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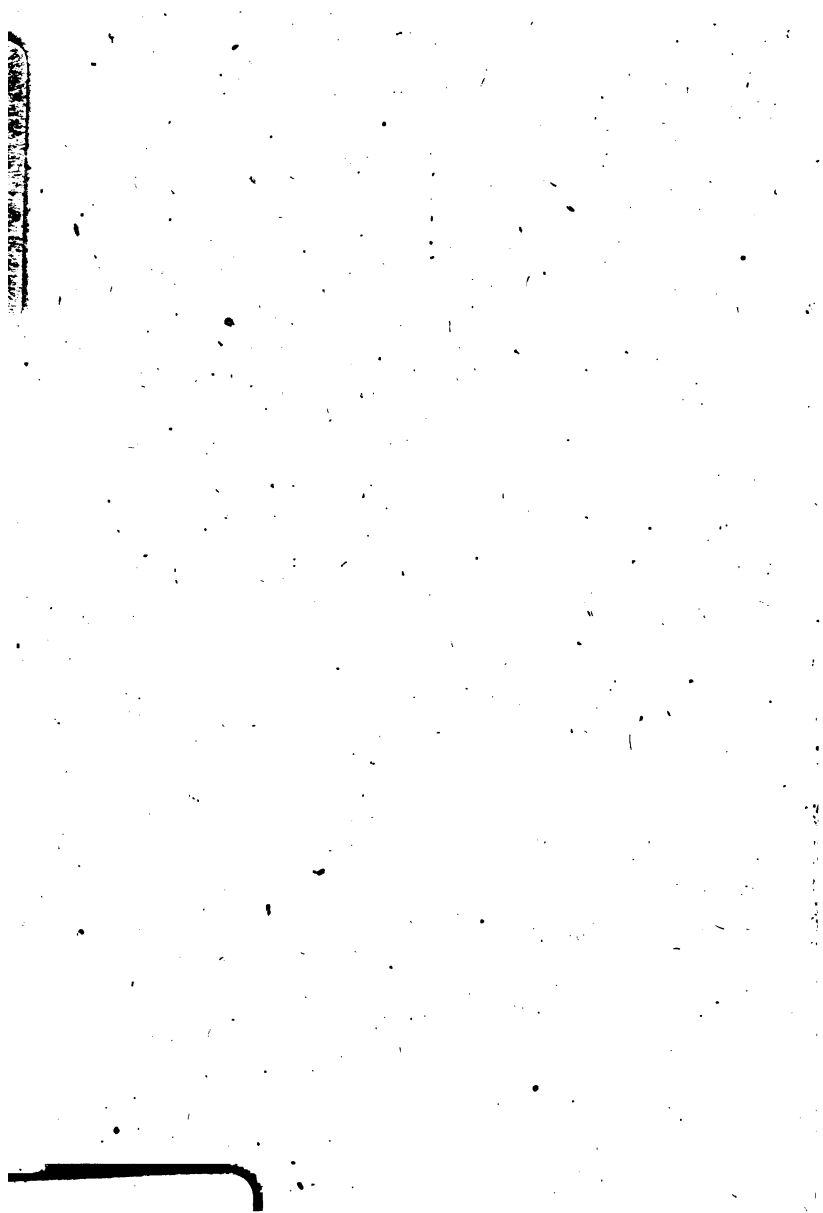
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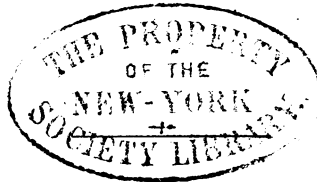


A

MOTHER'S TRIALS.

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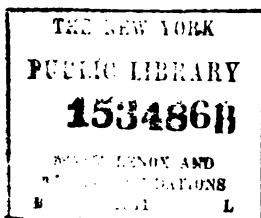
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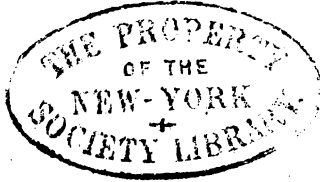


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A MOTHER'S TRIALS.

CHAPTER I.

IN the dusk of an August evening, a young woman sat in one of the large, gaunt bed-chambers of a German inn, putting an infant to sleep; a very young woman—a mother of scarcely nineteen. The room was bare and scantily furnished, with two beds withdrawn in one corner, a large folding-screen half concealing them; a large wardrobe of polished walnut, a few chairs and sofa of the same material, and two tables, making up its entire equipment. Three enormous windows, thinly shadowed by muslin curtains, threw in a flood of light by day, and even at present showed the twinkle of distant lamps from the great promenade, and admitted as much light as there was from the waning sky.

The scene outside, even in this dim hour, which was neither day nor night, was varied, gay, and pretty; full of animation and interest. Under those long rows of limes and acacias idlers were promenading, bands playing, voices and laughter, music that set the whole into rhythm and made a fit accompaniment, footsteps that unconsciously kept time to the music,—sounded into the fragrant evening, full of soft noises of its own; and all the innocent seeming and natural aspect of that out-of-doors pleasure in a crowd, which is so captivating at the first glance, was picturesquely visible from the great windows of this sleeping-chamber—visible so gaily and pleasantly that it was odd to see eyes of nineteen which could turn from it by choice or even with content.

But it was pretty, too—this window recess indoors, where the young mother sat. A little pile of soft, crumpled white on a chair beside her, surmounted triumphantly by the tiniest pair of quilted red silk shoes, showed that the baby had just been undressed; and a pretty little nest of a cradle, all pink and white, with dainty pillows and coverlid, elevated upon two chairs close by, showed where its tender repose was to be when that loving, long-prolonged task was over, and the child out of its sweet doze fell fast asleep. It must have been very fast asleep ere the reluctant nurse would relinquish her charge. She sat in the soft declining light, with her face bent over it, rocking slightly back and forward, singing the tenderest whisper and hum of a song. You might have said it was a child at play with her doll, and laughed at the pretty, dainty, girlish arrangement of everything which belonged to that most wonderful of babies. Most likely Amy would have laughed a little, and blushed a little, and acknowledged a certain truth in the accusation; but in her turn would have smiled at you if you knew better, with delicious, indescribable superiority and compassion. Poor soul, who had no baby! what could *you* know of those ineffable sweets of the early motherhood?

She was scarcely nineteen, a fair, light, delicate creature, whom such qualities as size and weight did not seem to belong to. But for the perfection of bright elastic health in her face and footstep, she would have looked fragile: but in reality, country breeding and good English blood had knitted her tender limbs into all the strength of which a woman is capable. If the promenade outside yonder fatigued her, it was fatigue more of the spirit than of the body; and she could have roamed about all day long with that same precious baby in her arms. She had indeed actually been discovered carrying the child in public, to the scandal and dismay of all Hesse, while Victorine, the French *bonne*, walked solemn and disapproving by her side. The offence had never been repeated, for “baby’s papa” had seen fit to administer a serious rebuke; but still Amy envied the nurse, and amid all the “distractions” of this gay little nest of dissipation cast longing looks at the happy woman who might carry her child wherever she would.

This poor little wife, however, had after all a great deal of her time to herself, especially within the last few weeks. Married out of her station, to a man some degrees above her in social condition, and many years older than herself, she had not been long in finding out how little likeness there was between her womanly customs of home life and his. Amy was exceedingly affectionate and fond of her husband; but perhaps she had never been very much what is popularly called "in love" with him, at least she was not *exigeante*, nor over-sensitive. It seemed natural enough to her that he should amuse himself after his own fashion; and she neither complained, nor even felt, except now and then, with some few brief twinges, that he neglected her—least of all now when she had baby! And then, these men—poor creatures! though they may be very fond of their children, can never have the new infant entirely as *we* can—proud mothers of the same! Laughing over him in her innocent girlish superiority—he who did not know how to take hold of the child, and she to whom even the mysteries of its toilette somehow came by nature, as they do to some women—Amy could not help being half sorry for him at the same time in her heart, and was quite willing that "poor Charles" should indemnify himself by other recreations, of which she was as ignorant as he was of the regulation of babies. Thus they had divided their leisure without discontent on either side. Latterly, within a few weeks, years of anxiety had visited even her inexperienced mind; he was out very—very late; he looked haggard and miserable in the morning: his temper, never the sweetest in the world, grew more and more imperious. Sometimes, when she thought over these things, a shade of dread fell over the young creature, who as yet knew nothing of the heavier responsibilities of life: but when something occurred to put an end to these cogitations—something, anything, a trifle was enough—her entire inexperience and confidence in everybody else's superior wisdom came to her aid. She had never learned either to suspect or to fear.

And now, at last, it is impossible to doubt that baby is asleep. When she has placed the child in its cradle, she stands by, gazing at those beautiful, tender, delicious slum-

bers, looking as if she could never be tired of looking, as if, in common speech, she were looking her last! Looking her last! The infant lay in its pretty nest, in the rosiest infant bloom; the mother stood by, in the fairest blush of health. Poor child and poor mother! the one as utterly unconscious as the other of the approaching fate!

If this was Fate which approached in the meantime, it heralded itself by the vulgar sound of a rapid opening and closing of the door of the adjacent room. "It is Charles," thought the young mother to herself, as she stood listening—and "I am here, Charles!" she cried softly, aloud. She had scarcely spoken when her husband was beside her.

"You are always perverse," he exclaimed, impatiently; "at this time you are perpetually in Victorine's room, and to-night you are here."

"Do you not wish me to be here?" said Amy, half amazed and half offended.

"Wish! what an absurd idea! what wish can I have on the matter," he said. "However, I have been looking for you. I want you to walk with me. Go and tell Victorine to look after the child while you are out."

Not overmuch pleased with the command, Amy went slowly to obey; but Victorine, as it happened, had something to say which occupied her thoughts and diverted her attention completely from the looks of her husband, which were less immediately interesting. Some particulars of that fairy first wardrobe—"baby's things"—had actually worn out and wanted renewing! Amy clapped her girlish hands with delight at the idea, and went back to her own apartment, at the end of some ten minutes' talk, in sudden perturbation, fearing that the patience of her impatient lord had been tried unpardonably, and full of compunction for delaying him so long. When she entered, however, he met her with no reproof; he was busy making up, without any complaint of the want of lights, a small parcel in paper—in three or four sheets of writing-paper, as Amy, with her frugal and orderly instincts, could not help observing, though the size of the packet did not require more than one.

"Shall I ring for candles, Charles?" she asked.

"No, by no means: hold this: now, my greatcoat, where is my greatcoat?—and see you take a shawl or a cloak—a good wrap: here! I'll carry it for you; and put on the thickest veil you have. Make haste!"

"Is it cold, Charles? The day has been so hot, I don't require anything but what I have on," said the amazed girl.

"Take a large shawl, I tell you; and make haste. We have a long way to walk, and we are sure to be late," exclaimed the husband, angrily. "Must I go by myself?"

"Indeed, Charles, if we are likely to be late, I think you had better," said Amy, with great composure. "For you see I have never been away from her before, and if baby should wake——"

"Confound that baby!" cried the angry father. "I have heard of nothing else ever since she was born. Amy! look here: come with me instantly, or by Heaven! you shall never see *me* again. You can take your choice."

"I am coming, Charles—I am coming!" cried Amy. "Go on before then, while I call Victorine. Oh, Victorine, in case baby should wake while I am out, you will not forget her bottle, and take care the milk is quite fresh, and sweet enough for her, and not too cold—I am coming, Charles!—and be careful and don't leave her by herself, she is so strong she might overturn the bassinet if she waked. Oh! I hope she will be good with you, Victorine!—Yes, Charles, yes, I am quite ready! and I shall not be a moment later than I can help, you may be sure—but oh, Victorine, till I come back don't fall asleep!—Yes, I am here, Charles——"

He was waiting for her at the door—waiting, not in his Englishman's overcoat which he had asked for, but in a great cloak with a hood, which looked almost like a disguise. Her start of surprise and almost terror as he drew her hand within his arm, startled him also a little. She thought, looking up into his face, that she could see a painful momentary red, as if he were ashamed of himself, flush across it, as the light shone on his features; but immediately after, they were out of doors in the soft darkness, amid all the gentle evening sounds which charm one's heart. Honest German people, returning home from country walks, met them as they hast-

ened upon their way. They had turned in a direction entirely different from the public promenade. All the gay hum of the watering-place died behind them.

"Where are we going, Charles?" whispered Amy, pressing closer to his arm. He pressed *her* arm to his side with a sudden movement which made it ache.

"Be silent," he said. "We are going where we are obliged to go. The quieter you are the better, both for my sake and your own."

"Has something happened? Oh! if I only could have brought baby under my shawl, I should never have said a word," cried poor little Amy. "Oh, Charles, I am afraid we shall be very late!"

"Don't make any row," said her husband. "I should have told you before we left, but for the scene. We shall not return to-night, Amy—nor at all. I am obliged to leave Hesse. Now no outcries, no screams, or, by Heaven! I shall leave you here, and you shall never see me again."

Amy did not scream, nor cry out, but turned right round upon his arm, and said—

"My child!"

The whiteness of despair and determination that came over the little girlish face alarmed him.

"Your child is perfectly safe with Victorine; you know she is. You know how that woman was recommended to you. Can you not trust her for a single night?—to-morrow we will send her instructions to follow us. Do you hear me, Amy? Every moment I lose is important; for one half hour's crying of that baby will you sacrifice *me*? Come on instantly; I cannot permit my time to be wasted thus."

"Oh, Charles!" cried Amy, falling down at his feet. "I'll run back all the way, and bring her under my shawl! She is so good she will never cry nor disturb anybody. Oh, Charles! she never was a night without me; she never was fed before. I will follow you to the end of the world if you will let me run back and bring her under my shawl. Oh, Charles, she is your own child!"

"Choose!" cried the angry man. "Will you leave *me* for ever, or *this* infant for a night?—there is no time to lose.

You little fool, come on, you can send for her to-morrow. Now, Amy, understand me once for all—you go with me or you leave me for ever: do you hear? Say another word and I am gone, and you shall never see me more!”

With her face white to her lips, pallid, with a chill and shiver in her frame, Amy raised herself up and took his arm once more—God help her! not able to articulate a word, saying with those colorless lips which brought forth no sound, “I will send for her to-morrow!” and with a dull ringing in her ears as of knells and death-tolls for the departing. She said no more as they went on upon that joyless road; her heart was dead to outward expression as well as her voice. Her youth was slain suddenly at a blow; cold dreads and doubts took possession of her, and her whole strength went into passionate inarticulate repetitions over, and over, and over, till the words lost their sense, “To-morrow I shall have her again. I will send for her to-morrow.”

CHAPTER II.

THAT night this pair went silently and swiftly down the Rhine, under cover of the darkness. One of them seeing nothing and desiring to see nothing but the points which marked their progress, and drawing his breath more lightly as ghostly town and hill glided by them in the starless summer gloom;—the other with her eyes upon those ripples of water, the soft, strong, living current of the river, which to her seemed like the movement of a remorseless fate, rushing downwards, thrusting farther off, pushing before them into the cruel distance and the moaning sea, the frail vessel of her hopes and heart. Amy had not recovered the voice which went from her in her first shock. When her husband invited her to go below, she answered only with a negative motion of her head; and he was not very urgent; for his purpose,

whatever it was, was served best by eschewing the light, and the society of other travellers. Something, perhaps, in her dumb, hopeless attitude struck him as he lounged beside her; he put her shawl round her shoulders with a remnant of tenderness which at any other time would have gone to her heart: she did not even notice it now, but sat motionless, gazing at that merciless stream as it glided under the boat and carried them on with an irresistible, invisible compulsion.

Wild thoughts of throwing herself down upon that cruel current, and somehow arresting it—stopping it with her hands, damming it up with her delicate body—went through her mind like flashes of madness; and with a gasp of despair she looked round her when the morning broke, half refusing to believe the undeniable witnesses before her as to the length of way they had already traversed. Two leisurely honeymoon tourists' days of travel—days not so very long past—had brought them only the same distance going up the river, as this one dreadful silent tide and night had carried them down! Something miraculous and unnatural seemed to be in the journey; for a moment a vague, ghostly fear sprang up in her mind: Was it her husband, her true husband, the Charles of flesh and blood, "baby's papa," who was carrying her away from her child? Alas! there could be little doubt about that handsome, cold, somewhat anxious face looking out from the great cloak. No Erlking was ever so coldly, firmly, calmly bent upon his own purpose as this unquestionable man. There was nothing malicious, revengeful, or demoniac in his face; he was simply doing a remorseless cruelty for a purpose which seemed to him important enough to justify it. Afterwards he might regret it to the bottom of his heart; he only looked anxiously and keenly to its success at the present moment. His own purpose well ascertained, and not to be shaken, animated him wholly now.

And with the morning, life began to revive in the little wife by his side. She was too young to be dismayed by one stroke, however violent; and the growing light, the brighter air, the sunshine, and common sounds roused her out of her stupor in spite of herself. She began to say in her heart, "To-day we are to send for her again," till the words grew

to a whisper. She went over, in her loving imagination, the infant's morning toilette, and refused to think of Victorine's dismay and terror, or of any harm that could have come to the child in one night.

"She is six months old, and in such delightful health! so rosy, and lively, and strong," said Amy to herself, her eyes filling with sweet tears. "Many a baby is quite weaned at six months old; it cannot do her any harm; and then she is too young to be anxious or frightened, my little sweet darling! And to-morrow, at the latest, to-morrow I shall have her in my own arms again!"

And the arms involuntarily opened, and were drawn in again with such a sigh! Such young arms!—arms that a boy-lover might have been dreaming pleasant fictions about, and inventing sweet comparisons for, but which were drawn in wearily to that aching mother's bosom—empty arms! Then Amy rose softly, just as her husband began to rouse himself to the chances of being observed; and as the full, early daylight brightened round them, she stole her hand through his arm with a timid, coaxing, caressing touch—timid because it was very doubtful indeed how far he might be pleased with it.

"Charles!" she said, doubtfully.

She was so anxious that he should not prejudice her, and turn away fretfully with the exclamation that she could talk of nothing but baby, that the prenatal wisdom of introducing some other subject of conversation first came into Amy's anxious head. To be sure, he *did* think she was about to speak on that endless subject, and prepared himself beforehand to shake her off with ready impatience.

"Charles!" repeated Amy, with her voice trembling, and a hundred anxious thoughts fluttering round these commonplace words; "what a very long way we must have travelled through the night!"

A little surprised, and a good deal relieved, to find that he was not at once attacked about the child, her husband looked up and down the river before answering her: then spoke with an impatient, long-drawn breath:

"Not one half so far as I could wish we had come. It is nearly ten hours since we left."

"Ten hours!" said poor little Amy, with her heart palpitating. "Oh! Charles—" then she paused again: too soon yet. Oh! if she could only conciliate him a little first! get him to be very—very good friends with her! But with that one only subject at her very lips, how could she find anything indifferent to talk about? After a breathless, momentary pause, she began again:

"It must have been something of great consequence to hurry you away so? Did you have word from home? Might I hear what it was? Was it anything from England, Charles?"

Looking up wistfully, with a little terror, in his face, Amy saw that color of shame, which she had detected for a moment the previous night, flush over him once more. He turned his head away from her, the flush deepening to an intolerable red.

"It was nothing from England—nothing you could understand, or have anything to do with," he said, sharply; "but of importance to me, or I should not have come away so hurriedly. You know *that* perfectly well. Why irritate me by questions? It is your confounded woman's way!"

Amy controlled herself once more from the appeal which was bursting to her lips; she was not angry. As a wife she was not so deeply sensitive as perhaps she might have been, and her mind was otherwise engrossed now.

"Shall we go on travelling all day?" she said, softly.

"Are you tired already?—tired with a single night, every hour of which you might have slept, if you would?" he exclaimed, only too well pleased with an excuse to be angry, and turning an impatient glance upon her.

"Tired! Oh! no, Charles: not the very least," she said, pressing still closer to him, in spite of his angry looks: "but—but—I could not help thinking I had better write a little note to Victorine, and tell her where to come to meet us, and we could send it from the next place we stop at; because the poor girl will be so very much surprised, and baby," said Amy, her voice beginning to tremble, "baby——"

"Curse baby!" cried the guilty husband, trembling with sudden rage, and thrusting her hand off his arm; "am I

never to hear an end of that child?" and he left her, to take a short angry walk as far as the deck would permit him, and returned again prepared to find her overpowered and in tears, and to declare that her pertinacity was enough to make any man furious, and he would endure it no more.

"No—no—no!" said the poor little mother. "Bless her! you meant, bless her! I know that was what you would say. Charles, let me send for her, and I will dismiss Victorine, and go with you anywhere—over the world! No fear of being tired, if I only have baby under my shawl. Oh, Charles! don't turn your head away from me; think of the little darling deserted, and not a creature knowing where we are; think of our own child—our only one—left by herself among strangers, and only six months old! and nobody that cares for her but Victorine! Charles, no one can tell what might happen in a day—in an hour. I will go down on my knees—I will never, never, never cross you or disobey you all the rest of my life, if you will only let me send for my baby—my darling, my sweet little child!"

"Be silent—sit down—do you hear me? Do you wish to make a scene, and have a crowd round us?" said the husband, in a fierce whisper, taking hold of her arm to lead her back to her seat, and as he spoke grasping it harshly—perhaps unconsciously—with his hand of iron.

She only looked up to him with her young, piteous eyes; she felt nothing but the prayer she urged; she did not kneel down as she wished; she restrained all the natural demonstrations of her agony in obedience to his will; she caught at his hand and held it, imploring him.

"I have her food in my breast, burning me like fire!" cried the girl-mother, with one pitiful cry and sob below her breath. "Oh, my baby! my baby! but you will let me send for her, Charles?"

Once more he turned away the whole length of the deck. Perhaps he had not left the place where the child was with any acknowledged purpose of deserting it; perhaps even now he would have given much had he listened to his poor little wife's first entreaty, and suffered her to steal the infant away beneath her shawl: but his heart was rapidly closing—filling

with the gall of shame, and guilt, and cruel bitterness. The child!—a creature scarcely conscious—a helpless, mindless atom of existence; and yet how poor was his own power over the girl he had married compared to the power of this tiny morsel of mere breathing flesh and blood! He returned this time in high indignation and lofty resentment. He stopped her renewed entreaties short without listening to them; he had already heard more than enough.

“Now listen to *me*,” he said, seating himself beside his wife, turning his face towards hers, and bending closely over her. “In this and in every other matter I claim your first consideration: you do not attend—listen! you *must* hear me. I have left Hesse only because circumstances compelled me—yes, *compelled*, though I hate the word. To return there, or to convey any intelligence of where I am to any individual in the place, is disgrace and humiliation to me—nay, death to me, for humiliation and shame I will not live to endure. Are you listening?—to send for the child is to sacrifice me—more, to betray me. I do not leave it to your own will—I forbid you. I will not permit you either to write, or send, or convey any message whatever. Beware trying to do anything clandestine, for I will find it out—do you hear? You shall neither send for nor seek your baby till we reach our journey’s end.”

“And then?” said Amy, with a gasp of despairing expectation, clasping her hands suddenly on his arm.

“And then?—that must depend on circumstances and your own behavior,” he said. -

Then he rose and left her, calmly and coldly; left her, and went down to the cabin, where he gave orders for some breakfast like any other gentleman traveller, having so much confidence in his wife that he knew she would not make “a scene,” though he taunted her with the intention, and secure in having disclosed his will to her at last. *She* sat motionless and still where he had left her; not silent, but dumb, in the horrible calm: paralyzed with an agony too overwhelming for any expression. The blood ebbed and blanched away from her very mouth, leaving her there with her lips apart, and her eyes gazing as if still her husband’s face was before

her, and his words killing her through her ears. All that cheerfulness, and love, and youth had done for Amy—to brighten, and strengthen, and animate—was then over. As she sat upon her bench in the Rhine steamboat, with the hills and the towns gliding past her like ghosts in a dream, the poor girl came down to the original of her character, and was in ten minutes a different creature. What years of sorrow, and care, and profitless labour might have made her, that half hour did perhaps more effectually. What years of comfort, and prosperity, and home love might have made, was henceforward an impossible hypothesis. In those long, slow moments of despair and stupor her doom was sealed. Such strength as she had was born of confidence in other people's affection, trust in the wisdom and justice of those who governed her young life. Beneath this, she had little innate power for either resistance or self-support. Now her heart went fluttering down—sick unto death—to its primitive elements: sinking—fainting—falling, ever further and feebler. She might resist, she might complain, she might struggle in her weak way: but persuasion, and influence, and individual power were over in this life for Amy—all over—quenched out of her for evermore!

CHAPTER III.

AFTER this the days passed like days in a dream—not many of them, but so slow, so miserably disguised in sunshine, such doleful, hopeless mockeries!—gliding past her with a progress so long drawn out and never-ending, that the unfortunate girl could not tell how many or how long they were, but felt them slow as years. When they had gone down as far as they could in the river-steamer, she was led into another at the mouth of the Rhine, whence they continued their journey without intermission across the sea. It did not matter to Amy: the same pitiless water, though in a wider and a fuller

form, surrounded her wherever she could see—the same tide inexorable carried her away from her child. Hour by hour she grew less conscious of everything external to herself. She had not given up her entreaties at once, even after her husband's cruel explanation; but they had changed their character, and sunk into feeble, pertinacious prayers—a weak mind's endless and injudicious pleadings. Now even *that* voice failed her. Burning pain in her bereaved breast, a wild, giddy lightness in her head, strange flights of delirious fancies about her mind, kept her fully occupied now with herself. She could scarcely walk; her head swam so dreadfully at the slightest motion: bells were perpetually ringing in her ears; and unconsciously in her pain she kept her hand close pressed upon her bosom.

It was in this forlorn condition that she arrived in London; came home—as she had been wishing to come for a year—back to England once again, back to hear English voices, and to feel herself in her own country. But she did not notice them now. She went silently where her husband led her, clinging to him to keep herself from falling; drove out with him—an endless drive through the streets—till they passed again into the country, and came to an humble little inn, much unlike the places they had been accustomed to rest in. The room she was taken to was clean, and fresh, and small—a contrast in every way to the forlorn bigness of continental chambers; but she did not feel the soothing influence of the English voices, scarcely even answered them, and lay down passively in her despair upon the bed, as she had sat up all these nights of travel. All these nights! there were but three of them, but they might have been ages, as Amy's experience went.

The next morning her husband was up early, for he had enough to think about to make him sufficiently wakeful. He was one of those men of the world who sometimes—by good fortune rarely—fall into what they call love, and marry in haste some simplicity at perfect antipodes to themselves—whom they vainly suppose they will be able to “form,” and make what they will of. Not very old, so far as absolute age went, but old in experience and acquaintance with that which

such men call "life." Some idle summer days in the country had brought him acquainted with the yeoman household in which Amy was the flower of flowers. The child was sweet in herself, and sweet in everybody's estimate of her. She had never been doubted or depreciated all her life. The admiring family love—that love which belongs only to one portion of life—surrounded her with an added radiance. The weary man of the world was charmed out of himself for the moment by the fresh nature so totally unlike his own.

It was perhaps the only thing which could have captivated his imagination from himself—to him the most perennially interesting object in creation. She was very—very pretty in her innocent girlish bloom. He fancied he could make anything of her; and he neither doubted, nor had any reason to doubt, that she would always give him all the devotion which he possibly could desire. She would be his own entirely, no one else having any share in her; for her friends were of a totally different class, and of course would resign her to him with becoming gratitude, and trouble him no more. So Charley Crawford, by way of beguiling his autumn *ennui*, married Amy Fielding; and no sooner did so, than it occurred to him that his father's views were likely to differ so greatly from his own on the subject, that it might be as well to keep his marriage very quiet, and accordingly carried his pretty girlish bride to the Continent, and there remained.

In the natural course of things, it came about that the simple country girl soon lost her hold upon Crawford's heart, if indeed she had ever penetrated the difficult geography of that unknown region; but with a calmness not quite so certain took comfort in her own expectations, and did not break her heart over her husband's neglect.

So far the story had gone in peace; but Crawford played like everybody else where play was a recognised business,—played luckily, played to lose, played desperately, lost everything he had, and more than everything; and that evening, after Amy had put her child to bed, came in, in calm desperation, with his purse empty, and his honor pledged to pay debts which nothing but gold could pay. His father was not rich; the godfather from whom he had expectations was

implacable in respect to gambling. There was nothing else for it: he left the voiceless infant who could not plead for herself without any softer compunction than a certain fiery pang of shame and remorse, and a horrible imagination of what the world would think, should that desertion be discovered. These at least were his only feelings now. Perhaps, at the moment, vague intentions of sending for the child "somehow," kept the cruel purpose from self-disclosure, and hurried, in the manner we have seen, his little wife away.

He stood looking at her now, this poor little wife! Why had not he left her too? Perhaps because a certain jealous nature in the man, born of pride rather than love, would not allow the humiliating supposition that Amy would have been happier with her infant in her arms, though deserted by her husband, than she could ever be with him now; perhaps because she was very pretty still, and belonged to him, and he had a certain liking for her. At any rate, there she was: he stood gazing at her, his brows knitted with perplexity. How was he to satisfy her mother's longings, her scruples, her pangs of bereavement!—how rouse her out of that stupor to any kind of rational existence?—how, without satisfying, make her presentable to any creature whom he wished to keep ignorant of the step he had taken. She was asleep, or seemed so, and could not see how he knitted his puzzled brows over her bed. How was he to bring her to reason, to common sense?—what could he do?

While he deliberated, she opened her eyes. In her sleep her face had been much flushed and her breathing hurried, but injury to her health did not occur to him as he looked on. Still less now when she opened her eyes and smiled up at him, as if all her troubles had been forgotten in her sleep.

"Charles, I thought you were gone," she said, quickly. "I was awake before when you did not think me awake, and now I suppose you have come back just to look at her again; you made me *so* happy, Charles."

"What made you so happy?" he asked, with a momentary thrill of fear.

"To see you playing with baby," she said, with a wandering smile. "You never would do it when I could see you before,

and I did not know—oh! forgive me, Charles! that you were so fond of her. And she grows so, doesn't she?—and feels her feet already, the dear little delightful pet that she is! I don't think people even know what it is to be *quite* happy till they have children. Do you know I have been lying all the morning thinking what we should call her when she grows older—for we must have a pet name, a home name—we called her Aprile because she was born in April; but I don't quite see how to shorten it. I have been trying every way; the English way with the beginning of the name, and the foreign one with the end. Aprie does not do, and I cannot manage the other. What do *you* think, Charles?"

What did *he* think? He turned away from her with a dismayed face and a momentary pang, in which Amy and her baby—while it lasted—were well revenged. That made no change in Amy. She lay smiling and talking without any thought of his answer, lifted out of all her griefs by a pitiful angel come under the guise of pain.

All that had happened, and all that might happen, were less than nothing to the poor young soul, suddenly rapt out of the pangs of her life into that dread happiness and composure which the spectator trembled to his very heart to see.

He retreated back from the bed, afraid to meet her eyes; but her eyes were not following him; she was no longer troubled for his displeasure, or concerned to know what he would say. After a while she began to sing softly with a hushing movement of her hand, as though once more in imagination she was putting her child to sleep. Her husband could bear it no longer; he rushed out of the room and into the garden of the inn, to collect his thoughts. He supposed nothing less than that this great shock had driven her mad; and disturbed though he was, by natural horror and compunction, it was the spectre of the life before himself—a life debarred from all further alliance, and with a wife in a mad-house—that flashed before him most vividly and distinctly as he rushed along the prim little gravel walk, considering what to do—he could not help that; the imagination was involuntary and undesired: but it *did* appear, as he asked himself

what was to become of her, and what he could do? A few minutes after he re-entered the inn, sent off a hurried messenger for the nearest doctor, and told his tale to the commiserating landlady:—

"We have just lost our child—our first child," he said, with becoming sadness. "I brought my poor wife away instantly, thinking to divert her mind from her grief; but the shock has been too much for her. Her mind has given way. Can you find a nurse in the village to attend her?—some one trustworthy and careful; or is there any one here in the house that can go to her now?"

"Poor dear young lady! poor young creetur! she is not what you call *violent*, sir?" said the landlady, "asking your pardon for the question—for the maids is so soon frightened—nor strong out of her mind?"

"She is as gentle as a child—violent!" cried Crawford, with another sharp pang, half of passion, half of remorse, that *he* should be asked if she was violent—*he* who had done it! "She thinks her child is alive, and is happy," he said, with a sigh of too late regret—"violent my poor little wife can never be."

"It's hard to tell, sir; many's the delicate lady goes furious when the brain's once turned," said the landlady. "I seen to one once myself when I was in service, before I married. *I'll* go to your lady, sir; she must not be left, poor soul! and we'll see what the doctor says. If she's clean gone, he'll tell you where to send her—he's a very clever man, is our doctor; for the sake of a fee or two he'll never bid you keep the poor thing here."

Crawford followed the woman up to the room; he dared not enter, but stood at the door to see if any change had taken place on his poor wife. He could just see her through the open door with a still more fiery flush upon her face, and her hands pressed on her head. She was not singing any longer—she was no more happy in her delusion—and as the stranger went into the room, he, standing without, trembled to hear a delirious voice, which was not Amy's, demanding her child—her child!

In a short time the doctor saw her; he came down to

Crawford shortly after, with a face not only grave, but full of reproof.

"The woman tells me you have just lost your child," he said, impatiently. "Did you mean to mend matters with that poor young creature by dragging her away, with her infant's nourishment in her bosom, and no one near her who knew anything about it? It is this barbarous kindness that kills more than cruelty! Your wife has a brain-fever, sir! a fever brought on by want of attention and common care. Of course *you* did not know what was necessary for a young woman—a young mother in such melancholy circumstances! Who would suppose you should know? But you might have distrusted your own wisdom, and left her to somebody who did. The consequence is, she has a brain-fever, sir; a disease the most dangerous, the most uncertain of any in existence. Why the deuce did you not ask somebody what was proper to be done for her, or have some sensible person about the poor young woman? Do you think *you* could turn the current of her blood into a different channel by a word? No. I have very little patience! I don't know you, sir—and I don't blame you, sir! Of course you couldn't know; but why on all the earth couldn't you keep your wits about you, and ask somebody who did?"

This sudden assault, though it brought a flush of involuntary anger to Crawford's face, and produced a somewhat impatient and sharp reply, was after all a relief to him. In the first place, though dangerously ill, Amy's intellect was in no hopeless condition; if she lived, it was by no means certain that her mind would continue alienated; and the very fervor of the doctor's displeasure proved his entire reception of Crawford's rapidly invented story.

The "anxious husband" returned to the inn-garden when the medical savage of Willesham had left him, with a much lighter heart. True, Amy lay in a desperate condition, and might die; but if she lived, his guilt was covered—his lost child accounted for, and everything made clear for a new beginning. Even Amy herself, after long illness and delirium, could not but be convinced by the story he would tell her. Her dreadful journey home, their sudden flight from Hesse

would pass for a dream among the other dreams of her fever. The child had died. What could be a more natural cause for the mother's illness and frenzy?

The whole matter looked like the contrivance of some propitious demon to help him out.

CHAPTER IV.

AMY lay long between life and death: her condition varied between short halcyon dreams of imaginary happiness, in which she still had and tended her child; hours of dull and terrible despondency, and fits of passionate appeal to her husband to restore her baby. Her disordered thoughts ran so continually in the same channel, that none of the few people who saw her entertained the slightest doubt that Crawford's account of the occasion of her illness was a perfectly correct one. The nurse who watched and tended her—a homely, kindly village woman—sat crying by the bedside when Amy broke into those despairing prayers and petitions, soothing her with ineffectual pains, crying—

“Don't ye now, poor soul! don't then. Don't take on. Oh! it wasn't your husband, poor lady! Oh! the Lord have pity on us. I knowed what it was myself when I was a little older than you. Don't take on.”

These homely remonstrances found no way to Amy's soul; she was alone with her imagination for weeks in the terrible solitude of her fever.

The inn was more commodious than the little village in which it was situated bore any promise of. It was on one of the great posting roads, the first stage out of London, with its prosperity already a little diminished by coming railways, but no great harm done as yet. The people of the house gave up two of their quietest rooms to the sick lady. The whole village learned to pity and talk of her. “A young

creature of nineteen, who had lost her baby," everybody said; and half the mothers in the place would have volunteered to nurse her for those very words.

Then the doctor, who was a doctor of the old school—skilful but not dainty, a man in full occupation, who could afford to laugh at imaginary ailments and discourage hypochondriacism—had first abused the incautious husband everywhere, and then filled the neighborhood with rumors of the beauty, and youth, and sufferings of the wife. He, too, stood by in her raving agonies of appeal, with tears in his eyes, and pointed his own moral, all ignorant of the reality, from poor Amy's passionate outcry.

"See what it is to force nature," said the good man. "Look here, Mrs. Welby. If this poor child—for she is little more than a child—had been let alone, and suffered to cry and break her poor heart over her baby at the proper time, we'd have seen nothing like this now. Grief would have had vent and been quiet. Instead of which, what do her very injudicious friends do?—tear her away, apparently the very moment the infant was gone—force her to travel, neglect her bodily condition, and bring on this frightful illness. God bless us! couldn't they have let her alone? That's the secret of half the calamities in this world. Why on all the earth can't we let our neighbors alone? You needn't sob—I know *you* very well, my good woman. I know if she ever comes to herself, poor soul! and I leave you with her, you'll be poking at her like all the rest with your confounded sympathy. If you do you know the consequences; she *shall* have a chance for her life, poor young creature! if I can give it her. Pitiful! isn't it? I shouldn't wonder, now, if she kept a delusion to her dying day that her husband made away with that child, all because their absurd kindness forced her away from it against nature; and serve him right!"

"Poor thing! it's hard enough, let things be the best they can," said the compassionate landlady, who invariably attended the doctor in his visits, and stood a good distance off by the door, looking down with serious observation upon the patient. The nurse was more deeply interested; she "had seen a deal o' trouble," and was tender-hearted. When

nothing else was possible, she stroked the coverlid and cried ; and totally beyond all soothing as the young patient evidently was, could not refrain from tender entreaties and remonstrances, which, had the doctor heard the half of them, would have driven him frantic. It mattered very little to Amy. They might say to her or over her what they pleased ; they might have brought the baby, whose loss had crazed her, into the very room, and the poor young mother would have been none the wiser. She never knew when her husband stood by her bedside ; in his presence, but without knowing it, she poured out those wild entreaties to him, from which he shrank pale with the guilt which nobody knew. At these moments there was something dreadful in his position. The poor kind-hearted nurse turned her soothing to him and whispered—

“ Don’t fret, sir. She’ll know better, poor dear, as soon as she gets well again : ” while the doctor triumphantly pointed out to him the consequences of his own folly.

“ Shouldn’t wonder, in the least, if it became a fixed delusion with her that you took the child away. I have known such things often. The hallucinations of a nursing mother are quite beyond control or calculation. Let this warn you another time,” said the implacable doctor, while Crawford stood by coldly listening, giving a forced, haughty assent, feeling his wife’s unconscious eyes burn into him with a dreadful truth which no one suspected. Poor maniac, rapt out of common life in her trance of fever ! it was she alone who was true.

When this had gone on till life and it could no longer go on together, a crisis came. Poor Amy recovered her senses and her consciousness, and came out of her fever in a feeble and bewildered condition of mind, which seemed perfectly suitable for her husband’s purposes. When she came to herself at first, he saw her only for a moment, under pretence of not agitating her : this was early in the morning : and she was then left in charge of the nurse, with strict injunctions to the most perfect quiet all the long day.

That day she lay in the prostration of extreme weakness, feebly trying to find again some thread of association—feebly looking round on the strange unknown place, and gazing

wistfully with eyes full of questions at the kind, unfamiliar English face at her bedside. The tender, injudicious, natural woman beside her did exactly what the doctor would have forbidden, but what perhaps, Amy also being unwise and natural, was the best thing for the patient. The nurse could not resist her pitiful looks. When she had done everything that could be done to make the poor young creature, for whom her heart ached, "comfortable," she stole close to the bed, caressing the coverlid.

"Dear, don't look so mournful like!" said the good woman. "You're better, and you're among friends, and you'll be took good care of. Though I'm a stranger to you I've knowed all my life what trouble was; and you'll soon be well if you don't fret and take on."

"Where am I?" said Amy, feebly.

"In Willesham, in the Red Lion, in the garden-room: the only place in the house where you don't hear no noise, and where there's the most air. As soon as she knowed you was ill, Mrs. Welby made things straight for you here; and most all the folks in the village ask when they pass for the poor young sick lady. There's been a deal of thought taken for you, ma'am, since you was took bad; and now you're well again, if you keep up your heart, you'll soon be strong."

"I wonder how I came here," said Amy again, with a sigh. The words themselves were a sigh, and there was something in the sound of them so profoundly melancholy, that the sympathetic nurse could scarcely restrain her tears.

"Dear heart," she said, with faltering uncertainty, afraid to speak and unable to keep silent, "your good gentleman—when there was no more could be done, and the Lord had had his will,—your good gentleman, out of kindness, ma'am, and love, ma'am, thought it best to bring you away."

"You mean," said Amy, in the lowest whisper that could be articulated, "that my baby died."

"Oh, Lord bless you, don't take on!" cried the nurse, half in pure sympathy, half in sudden terror lest some unfavorable change in the condition of her patient should compromise herself. "Oh, lady! a many more's suffered just the same! I lost my first when I was as young as you, and thought

nothing but I'd die ; but I've six now alive and well, besides more that's in a better place. Oh, ma'am, don't fret ! there's your husband to comfort you, and a kind gentleman as ever I see ; and you're young—terrible young, to be in such trouble ; you'll have a many more to keep up your heart !”

Amy made no answer : she heard the voice, the sound, the general tenor of the words. The words themselves even she heard so as to remember them afterwards with kind thoughts towards the speaker ; but at present their meaning did not enter her dulled mind. She was in a dim ocean of pain and perplexity ; everything was unreal about her ; she did not deny, she even suggested the death of her child ; but somehow had a hidden secret disbelief in it, like some secret of madness over which she returned to brood in her own heart. She was not in grief, she was not sorrowing, yet somehow accepted the idea that her baby had died, as if the fact could not be disputed, at least *here*. It was impossible to explain the strange condition of her mind. That which haunted her most was a sense of unreality in everything. She herself was the disguised visitor of some country of shadows, in which it was essential she should assent to everything, acknowledge what she was asked to acknowledge, and receive for truths what people told her as such.

Thus she took with a dim faith—yet a secret, inexpressible disbelief, which prevented her from feeling any acute sorrow—the intimation of her infant's death. She scarcely remembered the child in her blank of prostrated strength. She remembered nothing at present of her coming here ; everything was blank around and about her—dim, uncommunicating, vacant.

Thus she lay, weak to the absolute limit of living weakness—passive, languid, assenting to everything. Revival came slowly and gradually to her bodily frame, but as yet there came no revival to her broken spirit and mind overpowered ; the shock seemed to have been mortal, so far as these were concerned.

CHAPTER V.

IN a similar condition, though gradually gaining strength, Amy remained for many days. Her husband's visits were as short and hurried as possible, and he contrived carefully to avoid being left alone with her—a precaution which he might very well have spared, for her present condition was not one in which she was at all likely to rouse herself to the pitch of asking questions. It was with the profoundest astonishment that he found how readily she had acquiesced when she was told of her infant's death; he could not comprehend it, for her reason had returned to her, and the few words which she spoke were sufficiently rational. At first he took her quiet assent to the fact as a womanish wish to put him off his guard, and a wise respect to "appearances;" but when he found that Amy made no attempt to enter upon the subject with himself, and even showed no desire to send her nurse away or out of hearing when he entered the room, he became still more startled.

Was this the same creature who had besought him with such passionate entreaties to let her bring her baby under her shawl?—was this the young mother whose heart had broken over the compulsory desertion of her child? There she lay, pale, worn-out, passive, asking nothing, desiring nothing, content to believe what was told her, not even grieving, only dull—blank, languid, a melancholy, motionless soul. Was she the same Amy who, two months ago, had danced about the cradle of her child? Poor soul, no! The dreadful truth had passed from her mind at the moment: perhaps she might always remain in that happy ignorance; but its effects could never pass away. Her youth was gone, and all her confidence and comfort in life. She might never remember how or why her trust and heart failed her; but that heart and that trust *had* failed her, and were not to be renewed in this world for ever.

Vexed, and grieved, and irritated to see her in such a con-

dition, though it saved himself all the pain which he had anticipated of an explanation with her on her recovery—and pained besides, in spite of himself, by the perpetual reproach which the very sight of her conveyed to him—he left her at last, and went to town for a week or two, leaving behind the reputation of a most anxious and careful husband. He would not go—could not think of going—until he saw his wife in a fair way of recovery, in spite of the urgent business which called him to town.

Mrs. Welby, and nurse Patmore, and “the folks” of Willesham began to think that Amy’s long feebleness was a kind of passive ingratitude to so good a husband. His absence made no difference to her in her melancholy languor; she was getting better; she felt it, and said it to everybody who saw her; and was ready to take the advice of every separate person whom she spoke to, and thanked the rector’s wife and the doctor’s sister for their matronly counsels, with a sincerity and simplicity which took their hearts.

Sitting in the garden-room, from the windows of which you could see the late show of October dahlias and holly-hocks, and the paths encumbered with leaves whenever there was the least breath of wind, propped up with pillows in the great easy chair, with a little fire twinkling before her—in a pleasant invalid calm of convalescence and recovery—the quiet days after awhile began to soothe her unawares. Then Amy fell under the entire dominion of nurse Sarah, who told her stories all day long of the troubles which pursue life even in a village; of the great lady at the hall, who had lost all her children; of poor Mary Robinson, who out of eleven had “rared” but one; of all the village households where such gaps were visible: till somehow, by constant inference and association, her mind became accustomed to the idea of her own child’s death, and even softened into a sweeter melancholy, in which there was more of personal grief and less of stupor than before. Nurse Sarah, had the doctor known it, would have lost her name and credit for ever: but perhaps Mr. Fordham, who was a man, and so much wiser than poor little Amy, might have prescribed many remedies less efficacious than Sarah Patmore’s kindly, melancholy gossip. The

good woman could scarcely see a group pass the window but she drew something from it, intended to prove to the young mother how universal was her calamity, and what a wide common bond of mutual sorrow and pity united her to half the world.

"There be's all the little Lesters a-going to school, ma'am," said Sarah; "sweet childer, if you could but see 'em. The three youngest is steps-and-stairs, one head over another; but you can't count no more like that after Willie. He's eight, bless his soul! he was as sweet a baby as ever I saw; but the next eldest after him is Miss Lucy, and she's fifteen. It's easy to tell what that means in a young family. It means tombstones, ma'am, and funerals, and great grief and sorrow. I've nursed the missus, ma'am, with every babe she's had; and who should know like me? Many's the time I've said to her as I might say to you, 'It's fretting, ma'am, and fretting, and over again fretting, that ruins the constitution, and takes away a baby's chance for its life. When a lady's expecting, ma'am,' says I, 'it's her Christian duty to set her mind off them that's gone, and never to fret.' No more she should. I say them things, but in my heart I knows different. It goes by nature, ma'am, and not by wisdom, if nurses and doctors was to preach for ever. But when Willie was born, and a likely baby, you should have seen the joy and illumination in that house! Bless your dear soul! you mustn't take on! you're young, and you'll have a many of them yet!"

This last characteristic consolation scarcely reached Amy's ear. She was crying to herself quietly—her attendant's talk had beguiled her into imaginations of those other people whom she knew nothing of, but whose joys and sorrows, revealed to her even by so homely an interpreter, made them unknown friends. Somehow the world of strangers round her softened and grew more radiant under the poor nurse's descriptions. A first rising thought of renewed life, a momentary impulse of going out to seek them—those mothers whose children had gone down into visible graves—opening her dismayed, forlorn heart, and asking if *they* had felt this terrible disbelief of death, or if it was but a madness special to herself—came into her mind, and in that passing fancy, her

chains loosed from her a little, and tears—the natural medicine—came to her heart. She was still crying when the doctor entered: and nurse Sarah was busy about the window, and had not perceived these tell-tales, nor had time to frighten them away by dreadful warnings of his advent, and “what-ever will he say?” Sarah had a well-grounded confidence in “a good cry” herself: but Mr. Fordham was a bachelor, and hated the very sight of tears.

“Crying, eh? *Your* fault, nurse!” said the doctor, with a killing glance at Sarah; but he was judicious enough to linger a little till Amy had recovered herself, and to take no notice of the offending emotion to his patient. He sat down beside her, complimented her on her improved looks, and went on briskly with what Mr. Fordham called “the conversation:” which meant a series of little addresses from himself; with a restricted freedom of chorus to the nurse and assent to the patient.

“We are getting on famously now, I am happy to see,” said the doctor. “Still I should like to see a little more life, a little more interest. The strokes of Providence, my dear madam, must be borne: and the duties of life are far from being over because *one* is removed. There!—don’t be afraid—it’s not my line. I am not going to take the parson’s business over his head: but a little change, I think—eh, nurse? About this time a little society might be of use. That excellent lady, Mrs. Kindersley, at the Hall, spoke of calling to-morrow to take you for a drive in her carriage. Now, my dear young lady, do you think you are equal to that?”

Mr. Fordham made this announcement with a little natural exultation and triumph; for the truth was, he had been secretly working upon “that excellent lady” for weeks, by every possible variety of hint and suggestion, to stir her up to the length of making such a proposal.

Mrs. Kindersley was a very great person in Willesham; and though the doctor himself knew exactly what she was, and was not very profoundly impressed with her grandeur, he quite expected that other people should be so, and supported the pretensions of so great an institution as became an

old-fashioned conservative of the old school. A stranger, and above all, a woman, who could live for so many weeks in Willesham without a feeling of awe and reverence for the Hall, was not likely to be a favorite with the doctor. Accordingly, Mr. Fordham was extremely startled, surprised, and even a little affronted, when Amy answered his triumphant intimation only by a nervous stir in her chair—a passing feverish color which his eyes were too skilful to take for a mere blush, and a hesitating “My husband—” with a doubtful pause after the words.

“Well, your husband?” said the doctor, rather sharply; “do you mean that he does not like you to make friends. Nay—nay, I know him better than that. He’d be delighted, I assure you; besides being of very good family, and a—in short, in this quarter what you call a great lady—she’s a—a most superior person.”

Amy hesitated yet more; her old natural girlish frankness came struggling up as if through some dead weight of restraint which amazed herself.

“My husband likes me very well to see people,” she said, timidly, “when *he* knows them. No, indeed, doctor, he is very kind; it is nothing wrong; but I mean that—that I was not so good as he when we were married. Do you not understand me? I think I am bewildered. I don’t know how to say anything,” said poor Amy, with a blush of distress. “I mean we were poorer people—humbler—not so good—and he never liked me to make acquaintance with any but his own friends.”

“There! there! don’t talk any more—that is much too long a speech for an invalid,” said the doctor, entirely taken by surprise to receive so plain a confession, and charmed by its simple frankness; while, at the same time, comically disturbed by having the talking taken out of his own hands. “In spite of all this, I don’t see any objection to Mrs. Kindersley. Your husband, if he were Prince George of Cambridge, couldn’t object to *her*. And by-the-bye, when is he coming home?”

“He’s been and wrote *my* lady word that he’s a coming to-morrow,” said the nurse, interposing hastily.

Mr. Crawford did not stand in the very highest position possible with Sarah.

"Then to humor you, she shall put off a day or two. I'll say you're not quite equal to it yet," said the doctor. "No great fib either—hum! don't you think now, you'd like anything, like some books—like to travel about, like——?"

"Travel! no," cried Amy, clasping her hands together—the words startled her, she could not tell how.

The doctor also was startled by the interruption. Looking at her curiously, he saw the confused, bewildered look of pain coming once more into her face—"as if she wanted to think of something and couldn't," Sarah said. This roused some purely professional sentiments in the doctor's mind. He wanted to know whether he was correct,—whether any "delusion" on the subject of her child had survived the fever. It was an interesting subject, and one which attracted him considerably. He was by no means unkindly by nature, but the pursuit of science is an ennobling occupation, and abstracts a man from common emotions sometimes. He made his experiment at once.

"Your husband will see you much improved," he said, "and I dare say his return will enliven you a little. You must make little walks about the room; take Sarah's arm, you know; and get strong and able to go out with him, when he comes back. He has suffered a great deal of anxiety about you during your illness—pain too. Do you know, my dear young lady, that in your delirium you were constantly accusing him of taking away your poor child?"

"Oh, doctor! she ain't able to bear it! Don't go for to talk of the blessed babe right out!" cried Sarah, in his ear. "Don't, doctor! it's a deal too soon for that!"

"Of taking away my child!" said Amy, putting her poor hands unconsciously together again, and speaking under her breath.

"Don't let me agitate you—don't speak for a little. There now, you're better already," said the doctor, with some trepidation. "Get some *sal volatile* ready, Sarah," he added, in an aside, laying quick professional fingers on Amy's pulse. But that, it seemed, re-assured him slightly. "Quite a com-

mon delusion—I told your husband so—and quite gone off, to be sure, by this time. Don't get uneasy about it, now; all's right *now*, my dear young lady. Come—come, you will make me think myself a brute if you look so pale. Sarah, your lady will lie down; we'll give her a little composing mixture, and she'll be better in an hour or so. Why, there's the color coming back—she's better already! I knew it would be so."

When he had seen her laid down and administered the *sal volatile*, the doctor thought it most prudent to withdraw, not over-pleased with the effect he had produced.

"I knew it would be so!" he repeated to himself, outside the door. "I knew it would be so!" he said again, when he was fairly out; but he did not take so much pleasure in the verification of his suspicions as he might have done. And that evening he started nervously when unexpected knocks came to his door, and could not get out of his recollection that pale face. While Amy lay on the sofa—trembling, she did not know why—trying hopelessly once more to arrange her confused recollections, saying to herself under her breath, over and over again, "Of taking away my child!"

CHAPTER VI.

THAT same afternoon Crawford returned, a day earlier than he was expected. He came, though professedly from London, yet with all the appearance of having made a very much longer journey. Though he asked for his wife immediately on entering, he showed no great haste to see her. The truth was, that her very passiveness, the broken spirit and unawakening mind, troubled him more than the questions and pleadings, the passion and active wretchedness which he had anticipated. The very success of his expedient gave him, every time he saw his wife, a bitter pang of self-reproach. It left the whole mean crime of deserting the infant upon

himself: and with a natural inconsistency, while he knew her ignorance to be most desirable for the preservation of such a secret, he chafed at the thought of bearing the entire burden himself, and being unable even to call her an accomplice, or defend himself from his own self-accusations by repelling hers.

Besides, to feel that so extraordinary a change in a human creature so closely bound to him had been produced by himself—that it was *his* act which had transformed the happy, blooming Amy into this broken and passive shadow, was not a pleasant thing to dwell on. He lingered about his travelling-bag, carrying it himself to his room, and brushing the dust off his light coat before he approached the sick chamber. Then he went with the suddenly quickened step of a man who makes up his mind to a difficult business “to get it over.”

The first thing he saw when he entered was his wife, walking from side to side of the apartment leaning on the nurse's arm; the exertion had brought a little color to her cheek—her eyes were fully opened, and full of a strange self-inquiry. Something more than when he last saw her was moving on the delicate chaos of Amy's pale young face.

“Why, that is right! this looks something like progress,” he said, cheerfully, going up to her. “Now you begin to look like yourself again; let me have her arm, nurse, I am stronger than you.”

“Strength ain't everything—there's a deal in people's way,” said Sarah, yielding her place with a little reluctance. “*My* lady was a-coming on beautiful if it hadn't have been the doctor put her out a bit to-day. Them doctors, they've their own skill, but in many things they don't know no better nor other folks. Softly now, sir: bless your heart she ain't fit to go so fast. I tell *my* lady, sir, if she do but keep up her heart and don't fret she'll soon get strong.”

“Very good advice,” said Crawford, “and I hope she will take it. Are you not permitted to leave the room yet, Amy? We must get you out of doors as soon as the doctor will permit; I want you to see this pretty, quiet place. I have a great mind, at least till you are quite strong, to remain here.”

“The doctor wishes me to go out,” said Amy, faintly.

"And Mrs. Kindersley at the Hall has sent word she's a-coming for *my* lady in her carriage," cried Sarah, who felt a personal gratification in the honor. "But the dear soul would not hear to it till you was here, sir, to give the word."

"Thank you, my love, I prefer that you should not know the great people of the village. It was very considerate of you," said the husband, with a momentary touch of tenderness and compassion in his voice. "Come, you are quite strong, you must extend your walk. I suppose, nurse, we may pass through the next room?"

"But she's not a-going without a shawl," cried the careful Sarah. "It's easy to tell *you* ain't used to sickness, sir; but if the draught strikes to her, and she has a cold to-morrow, who has the doctor to look to but me? Now look here, I'll put it over her head, and for a treat you may take her to look out of window in your own room, and see the evening coach. It ain't what it used to be, along o' them railroads—and they tell me it'll stop one o' these days; but it's cheerful to look at now."

So saying, Sarah carefully wrapped her patient in a large shawl, laying it over the pretty white cap that Amy wore: it was crape, and of a faint pink color, which lent the slightest possible tint to the invalid's complexion. So she went feebly, for the first time since the night on which they left Hesse leaning on her husband's arm. This of itself, perhaps, contributed to increase the general agitation and stir of her faculties which the doctor's question had originated; she began to feel more and more that she had something to remember, something which it was of the utmost consequence for her to recall, something which the merest thread would guide her to, the slightest touch open upon her mind once more.

Her husband led her very tenderly, very gently; for he was moved by her weakness and helpless condition, and surprised by her pale girlish prettiness and subdued grace into something of the old protecting fondness to which the country girl had beguiled him when he knew her first. He began to think that things might be better than he feared—that her passive wretchedness was yielding—and that natural sorrow.

true in itself, though springing from a false belief, might possibly elevate and refine his little Amy into such a woman as had been hitherto beyond his highest imagination for her.

So he brought her into his room to the white-curtained window, looking out upon the street, with a care and regard most unusual to him; and placed a chair for her, that she might look out, with the greatest tenderness possible.

There she sat down thanking him; but she did not turn immediately to the window,—she looked round the room, as was natural to an invalid confined within the same four walls for months. It was an ordinary little inn bedchamber, with the same bed hung with dimity, the same white curtains and cotton fringe, the very same colored prints on the walls, and queer dark oblong looking-glass on the table, which we are all acquainted with. On that table, however, lay something which strangely attracted Amy's attraction, three or four sheets of writing paper all together, close as when they were in the ream, but looking as if they had enclosed a little parcel of some kind, and still bore its shape in thin, stiff, and self-supporting folds. Amy saw this and recognized it. With a little start and cry, she put her piteous hands together as if with a dumb pathetic appeal against the frightful recollections that poured upon her.

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried the poor child, groaning aloud in the extremity of her recovered anguish. Never before had that holy name pointed any exclamation from those innocent lips. God help her! she could never forget any more.

"What is it, Amy?—are you ill?—has anything happened?" cried her husband, entirely taken by surprise: he could not conceive of any discovery which could bring such an exclamation from *her* lips. When he turned round, he saw her wringing her hands, with her delicate body bent as if in pain insupportable, and her eyes fixed upon the paper. When she heard his voice, she turned to him. Such eyes! no tears in them, nor possibility of crying—only a terrible, hopeless certainty, fixed and stupefied. What all her painful thinking could not do, that scrap of paper did—she remembered it all.

"Well," he said. His tone in spite of himself was conscious and defiant. Though he had no special associations with the paper, he saw what it was, and comprehended the whole: she had caught the clue to her disordered and confused thoughts.

Once more they stood face to face knowing what they had done—what *they* had done. Though poor Amy was as innocent as her deserted child, the act, the responsibility, the sin was joint and mutual; they looked in each other's faces, the one inflamed with an instinctive resistance and defiance; the other in a blank of despair and misery hopeless to see. Henceforward no veil of ignorance could fall upon that trembling feeble soul; henceforward an invisible barrier had risen between her and all these other mothers, of whom this very day she had been thinking so wistfully. Henceforward poor Sarah's sympathetic talk and homely consolations must be torture and agony to her heart. Once she looked up with a silent hopeless appeal into her husband's face, but she knew now it was vain; she knew now that no power in the world would make him yield; at last she perceived that her only hope had been in the first moment; and bitterly, miserably, in all the aggravation of a consciousness that came too late, felt in the depths of her heart, that she *might* have been free herself from all this anguish, might have delivered him from this shame and guilt, had she only held to her first petition, and gone back in the darkness, as she might have won him to permit her to do, to bring the deserted baby under her shawl. She folded her arms under that shawl as the thought came poignant and sharp, like a dagger into her heart.

Oh, heaven! oh, patience! that touch was almost too much for the feeble reason, which had scarcely regained its seat. She made a convulsive effort to get up, and stared about her wildly, as if seeking some place to conceal herself from this intolerable pang. Her husband came to her without a word, drew her arm once more into his own, and led her to the door. She was aware even of the change expressed by that touch, which was no longer tender but formal, a necessary attention. When they had reached the door, he stopped, and looked gravely in her face.

"Let there be no more said between us on this subject."

he said; "if it were possible to do anything to remedy the step which has been taken, without prejudice to my character and honor—which it is not—the time is already past for anything of the kind. It is now little short of three months since we quitted Hesse. By this time it is an old story and forgotten; be silent, and if it is possible, be content."

No other word was exchanged between them; he took her back to her own room, and gave her into the hands of Sarah, who received her with a flutter of cheerful questions: but seeing that her poor patient returned paler and sadder than ever, speedily enthroned her in quiet in her easy-chair, and began to bustle about the little fireplace, and prepare the tea, which was *her* universal panacea for all troubles, when everything else had failed.

"Maybe she see some little thing the same size as her own out of window," thought to herself the sympathetic nurse. "Poor soul! she'll fret herself to death, unless there's a change soon; and more harm nor good *he* does her, as a blind man could see."

With which reflection, Sarah set all her faculties upon the toast, though with many a glance behind, and mournful shake of her head.

What could the simple soul do more? Though Amy could scarcely see with her dull eyes what was set before her, it was the truest delicacy, the most womanly natural kindness which put it into Sarah's homely mind, to be so dainty with the toast. While she was busy thus, her poor young patient sat trembling behind her, afraid to betray herself by some cry or convulsion, bending all her feeble faculties to the control of her own lips, and hands, and person, seeing before her very eyes that great vacant German room, with the distant lights twinkling in the large windows, the gay distant hum touching the stillness, and her husband in the twilight folding yonder sheets of paper round the packet he was about to carry away.

Amy sat as though she were looking at him, still with the old wonder in her mind, why he took so many together when one might have done, and held her head stiffly erect, terrified to look round in that imaginary place to see the pretty

cradle in darkness and the sweet sleeper there. She knew so well where it stood, exactly the spot; she dared not turn her head, once more she put her pitiful hands together, and prayed not to think of it, lest she should go mad; while meanwhile Sarah lighted the candles and drew the curtains, and lingered about with affectionate cares, drawing softly the heavy chair forward to the little table, where was already spread the dainty toast and the tea.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT though both the nurse and doctor were confounded by the unexplainable change in their patient next morning, a change at once extraordinary and indescribable—Amy in a few days, by some equally occult process—had ceased to be an invalid. Sarah's sympathetic cares and the compassion of everybody were a trial now beyond her strength. In spite of the apathy which grew upon her, she could make that effort—she could escape from the pity and tenderness which must have been turned to horror and disgust, had any one known the real state of the case. Now that the explanation was over, and she had again discovered the truth, her husband no longer avoided her. There was now no mystery between them, no angel veil of delusion blinding her innocent eyes, and leaving him half-satisfied, half-embittered, to bear his guilt alone. She knew all, and he was relieved by it, and could speak plainly, and stand without embarrassment before her, on whom he now unhesitatingly laid the half at least of his fault. In his heart, he said, excusing himself, that had she but pressed her entreaty as she ought, on that first night, he would have yielded and let her go—he had grudged the exemption from this burden which her fever brought her, and he was satisfied now, strange as it is to say it, and felt a certain comfort in finding out other symptoms of her yielding and weak disposition, and making a secret plea to himself, for himself.

that had his wife possessed the least firmness or strength of character, he never would have carried out that impulse, the unfortunate suggestion of his misfortunes.

It was necessary now for some time that they should live somewhere in quiet, and out of the world, in case any English acquaintance might by chance hear of the affair at Hesse, and manage to bring it home to him: there were few English, however, as it happened, at the place, and such as there were, he had avoided. His own name was not so remarkable as to be a certain means of identification; and the hero of such an adventure was very unlikely to be found a few days after at a quiet little country inn, watching over a sick wife, and impressing his landlady with the highest idea of his conjugal perfections. On the whole, after much thought, Crawford had resolved to settle for a time in Willesham.

Of all the places in the world to seek a man of a certain degree of fashion, temporarily under a cloud, a village ten miles from London, almost a suburb, was one of the most unlikely; while his continuance here prevented the necessity at present of introducing Amy to his family, who as yet knew nothing of her.

On the whole, his mind was made up: they could live very well here on the allowance made him by his father, and supplemented by the annual present with which his godfather, a rich man, distantly related to him, but having no other kindred, acknowledged him as his heir. If that godfather would but be so complaisant as to die, and free him at once from his cares! But old men with estates are proverbially selfish in such matters as dying. So the most prudent expedient which Crawford could think of was to take a little furnished house at Willesham, make up his mind to unlimited *ennui* for a year or two, and settle here.

When he communicated this intention to Amy, she assented, as she always did. She made no objection to go out with him to see a house: she went over it, looking at everything as he told her, and joined in all his approbation. By this time she was well: she walked without fatigue, but with a step heavy as the step of age; and the bloom was gone permanently from her cheek. Not that her paleness was

startling or excessive, or that the hue of health in its first return did not appear there : but the bloom—the warm blush of her youth and her hope—had left her for ever. She was not changed so that the general world could pause to stare and say : “Something has happened to this woman !” The difference was to those who knew her : the change was from a happy, trustful girl—candid and innocent, confident in herself and everybody else, sceptical of nothing but wrong and unkindness—to a timid, weak-minded woman, bound by some invisible constraint, afflicted with some untold pain, never at ease nor secure of anything, doubtful alike of herself and of every one she saw.

And now, for the first time, even the defects of her original breeding became visible in Amy. Under cover of her girlish grace, freedom, and simplicity, she might have passed anywhere without remark, except of admiration. Now she showed a hundred deficiencies which nobody had ever seen in her before. Her ignorance of society, her want of acquaintance with its customs, her awkwardness and blunders—blunders and awkwardness which the pretty Amy of Woodcote had never shown, and which his own happy young wife was equally free from—disclosed themselves one by one to the eyes of the husband, which had no glamour in them, and saw everything coldly and clearly in the light of common day.

He watched this strange development of her trouble with an astonished curiosity, in which there was more of irritation than sorrow. He was vexed and disconcerted to think, if this should last, how little credit his humble choice would do him.

“Not even pretty, not even clever—a mere dowdy farmer’s daughter,” he thought he heard his friends saying : and he was angry, and felt he had good reason. He even resented her indifference to the house, and her faint attempt to appear interested—both were alike offensive to him. If he could content himself with it, was it for her to contemplate the little house so coldly ? Yet he did not say anything—he did not let his wrath evaporate in words—but withdrew, and became haughty, and cold, and reserved, as superior men are not unapt to do when they are disappointed in their wives.

This in its turn was something new for Amy. She knew what it was to be left to herself—to sit alone while her husband “enjoyed himself,” as perhaps she would have said—to have him out late and at home seldom; but she did not understand the harder discipline of an abstracted, cold, silent companion, whose eyes watched her movements with unfriendly criticism,—whose heart put no favorable construction upon anything she did,—who was ready to note all her mistakes, and excuse none of them, and from whom indulgence and tenderness were not to be hoped. If she had been ill at ease before, she became more and more uneasy now; her very movements and gestures grew awkward: a constant trepidation clung to her; and it was thus that they began, in an English village home—after that introductory chapter of existence, which had commenced so fair and ended so miserably—their married life.

The house was a pretty, low, two-storied house, with a bright little margin of garden round it, and luxuriant lilacs and laburnums—growing so strong that they might be called trees—sheltering one side. The lower floor held a series of rooms, gleaming with open doors out of one another, all low, all decorated alike, all looking upon the lawn, for the lawn, though there was not much of it, was everywhere, and surrounded the walls on every side. A dining-room, a library, a drawing-room, and a boudoir so called, lay in a square round the little hall, all shining and sunshiny, and fanciful, in a refinement of half-cockney, half-rural taste. The kitchen was thrust out from one side of the house, a vulgar but necessary addition; and nothing could be prettier than the little suite of rooms, quite such a tiny nest as any couple of young people might have chosen for an elegant version of Love in a Cottage.

Alas! a cottage ornée where love is not—where those gleaming open doors only prevent the two who sit apart from feeling the comfort of solitude, but which are not shut for fear of offence-giving and suspicions of a wish for privacy! There was prettiness and elegance of its kind, but comfort did not enter with “the new family,” and they carried no gladness there!

CHAPTER VIII.

LONG before her parents entered their English cottage, Providence had decided the fate of the deserted child.

It is needless to describe the dismay and apprehensions of Victorine during that endless night. Distracted by the baby's cries and her own terror lest something should have happened to Madame, but unable to excite the apprehensions of the servants of the hotel, to whom the absence of Madame, in the company of her husband, did not seem remarkably alarming, the poor Frenchwoman lulled as well as she could the indignant and disappointed baby, and made up her mind to indemnify herself for the night's rest she had lost, and the dread anxieties she had endured, by throwing her little mistress into the most dismal fright about the terrible consequences likely to result to the child. But when the day came and brought no mistress with it,—when, instead, the people of the house began to come rudely into the room to examine what baggage there was, and rumors of her master's great losses at play on the subsequent evening reached Victorine's ears, the good-hearted *bonne* snatched the unconscious infant into her arms, and covered its face with kisses, with an involuntary impulse of consoling the abandoned one, though she could not sufficiently repeat her denial that it was abandoned.

What! Madame desert her child? Madame, whose heart was wrapt in her baby? Madame, who was innocent as a child herself, the dear young angel! Victorine angrily ordered the *miserables* who dared say so, out of her mistress's apartment, and threatened all manner of penalties and punishments when Monsieur should return.

But the anxious *maitre-d'hôtel* was not to be so dismissed; and when it turned out upon examination that Amy's little jewel-box was empty, and that everything valuable which could be carried without suspicion was gone, even Victorine faltered, and for one troubled moment thought of her wages, and her *renseignements*, and what she should do, thus thrown

upon the world. Then the kind Frenchwoman cast her eyes upon the child—the child which, comforted by her efforts, and dressed for the day, had fallen softly asleep in her arms, in its rosy beauty, sweet, dimpled, smiling, and unconscious, nothing troubled by the misfortune which would fall most heavily upon its innocent head. Poor, friendless, deserted baby! what was to become of it, thus abandoned? *She* was poor enough and would feel her loss; but the unfortunate, innocent, helpless child!

Very soon there was a little crowd about the baby, speculating what was to be done with it. The whole population of the hotel soon became aware that something unusual, something to gossip and be excited about, had happened in these rooms, which accordingly were soon crowded with a little throng of idlers, asking every kind of question in half the known languages of the world, denouncing the heartless parents, and with all the levity peculiar to such an assembly, discussing the infant's fate. Among the rest came a homely Englishwoman, who pushed her way perseveringly through the crowd, managed to get her head and shoulders into the foremost circle, looked anxiously and lovingly at the child, and then glanced up with half-suspicious eyes in Victorine's face.

Victorine sat indignantly silent, shaking her head vehemently when addressed, devouring with angry ears all the abuses she heard launched against the unfortunate young mother—the kind girlish mistress who had reached to her own heart—rocking herself or the baby on her knee, sometimes softly, sometimes violently—the only expression of her sentiments which she would permit herself, and keeping in by an effort the tears of passion and mortification with which her lively black eyes were full. When those other eyes, sympathetic, homely, inquiring, met those of the good-hearted *bonne*, Victorine's tears fell in spite of herself; she cried out:—

“Madame would never desert her baby, Madame will return! she is an angel! she is innocent!” with all imaginable vehemence of voice and gesture, angrily addressing the amused and sceptical crowd. The quiet Englishwoman grasped her hand lightly for a moment.

"God bless you! Take care of the dear baby, and don't go away till I come back," she said hurriedly: then added, with a blush, "*Gardez bien ce chère petite—attente à mon retour;*" and with her cheeks tingling with the extraordinary effort, disappeared among the crowd. Then leaving the room and the throng, this stranger hurried along a maze of passages and up a long flight of stairs with all the haste possible to a little stout woman of middle age, whose waist was wider and whose breath was shorter than they used to be, and whose kind face was, at the present moment, wistful and anxious with a sudden purpose, and still somewhat fluttered by the extreme boldness of venturing so many words in "a foreign language," with the wonderful result of being understood.

When she came to the door of her own apartment, she hesitated for a moment to take breath and courage; then pushed it open with resolution. It was just such another bare, large room, as that in which Amy's deserted baby lay sleeping on her nurse's knee, a floor higher, with the same sun shining into it, looking out on the trees of the same everlasting promenade. Here, at a little table, in his dressing-gown and slippers, and with a *Galignani* in his hand, sat the husband, the masculine counterpart of the good little woman, who entered with so much apparently unnecessary determination. He was just as much taller, older, and more serious as was necessary for his manly dignity. The two together were such a pair as, it is common to say, England alone produces. Perfectly unsentimental, commonplace people, not clever, not peculiar, by no means devoid of little vulgarities, but so sure of each other, so happy and affectionate in their homely way, that they were able to believe in the happiness and truth of other people, to think all wrong and misery things intolerable and to be amended, and to keep the warmest fund of charity and kindness in their two homely hearts.

In other nations such people, when they exist, keep at home, and preserve their simplicity by means of the village limits, or the town boundaries within which they have been born. But the Englishman and his wife, who had plenty, and could afford to enjoy themselves and see the world, were as safe at the wicked German watering-place, as they would

have been in the innocence of any village. They carried their atmosphere with them as they carried their troublesome stock of English comforts, and with a most laudable and lively condemnation of foreigners, bore a heart open to all the world.

"Oh, Sam!" cried the wife, as her husband looked up from his paper; "oh! Mr. Walkingden, I have had such a turn! I thought I should have fainted. What do you think has happened below stairs?"

"What is it, my dear? not a murder?" cried her alarmed auditor.

"There are some murders would be innocence to it," said Mrs. Walkingden, sitting down and wiping her eyes. "Poor, sweet, innocent! to see it sleeping yonder like an angel, and no more thought of what's happened than you have! Oh, Sam! I know the world is a wicked world, but I could not have believed, if I had heard it from the pulpit, that *two* people could have the heart to do it. No! depend upon it, it's been the father, and not that poor—*poor* little wife!"

"But, my dear Sally, what is all this?" said cheerful Mr. Walkingden. "Something with a baby in it, and a 'poor, poor little wife?' I don't put so much faith in your judgment, my dear, when a baby is concerned, as I do on any other occasion. What's the matter? Must I put on my coat?"

"Presently," said the good woman, with a momentary tremor. "But wait till you hear my story. Have you ever noticed down below a pretty little English girl with a baby? To be sure you have! a mere child herself: a dear little girl of eighteen or so; and never jaunting about or showing herself at the dances or anything, but always with her child. I will never believe it was her fault! Well, Sam, they went away last night, she and her husband—that tall man; went away without saying a word, taking everything they could carry with them, and—oh! my dear, it is impossible to think of it!—leaving the child—deserting the dear baby, Sam!—leaving that sweet darling infant on the world! When I saw the innocent sleeping, and to think of its father and mother gone, and not a creature to care for it, I could have broken my heart. Oh, Sam—Sam! God's ways *are* strange—if *that* blessing, now, had come to you and me!"

"Hush, Sally—hush, my dear! a great many blessings have come to you and me," said her husband, gravely.

"Yes—yes, and thank God for them all; but would not we have toiled day and night for such a blessing and comfort, and praised Him on our knees!" cried good Mrs. Walkingden, with a little overflow of tears. "And to think of deserting that precious gift of God! But if you should preach till to-morrow, and all the world join in with you, Sam, I will never—never believe the poor mother had any hand in it. At her age! Take my word, she's been deceived and deluded, and taken away under false pretences. Poor thing! poor little soul! and there's all the dirty moustaches in the house cutting their jokes over that innocent baby—bless its little sweet English face! Oh, Sam Walkingden! we're rich and well off, and so are our friends. Will *you* go and be like the Levite and the Pharisee, and pass by on the other side?"

"My dear!" cried Mr. Walkingden, in an astonished appeal against this gratuitous condemnation, "consider I never heard of the story till this moment. I'll put on my coat certainly, at once, and go and inquire about it. The landlord speaks very good English. Poor child! poor infant! It seems a very pitiful business, Sally, my dear. I don't see much that *I* can do, for my part; but, to be sure, the first thing is to inquire. Last night only! What, if the father and mother have only gone away somewhere for a day, and are coming back?"

"The gentleman—though indeed he's no gentleman—a gentleman would never desert his helpless child!" cried Mrs. Walkingden—"lost a great deal of money last night, people say, and they went away in secret, taking everything they could. Oh! no—no! they're not coming back. I told the maid myself—she's a French maid, but she understood me very well—a good creature, I am sure, and fond of the baby—to wait and keep quiet till I came back. I knew you would feel, as we were English, Sam, it was our duty to interfere. There, your coat is very well; here's your hat, and your gloves are in your pocket. Come, I'll show you the way."

So saying, the good woman led off her husband triumphantly with her hopes rising. She almost feared to see the child's mother in the disturbed apartment. Poor, help-

less, forlorn baby! How her motherly heart, to which God had denied all reality of motherhood, yearned over the deserted child!

CHAPTER IX.

THE crowd had dispersed a little when the good English couple entered the room, for even so piquant an incident gets exhausted after an hour's discussion. The baby lay asleep in its cradle with Victorine watching by it; two or three men, perfectly verifying Mrs. Walkingden's description as "dirty moustaches," stood together, making odious jokes about the business—one of them running together a little romance describing Monsieur, in despair at a sudden discovery of dishonor, rushing into the conjugal chamber, tearing Madame away from the child which he no longer would acknowledge, swearing a desperate vengeance upon the unfaithful wife, and leaving the offspring of shame to its fitting fate. This delightful and appropriate little drama was vehemently applauded by his companions; nothing could be more probable, nothing more true to life, more likely to have occasioned the catastrophe which had just happened. In short, nothing else could sufficiently account for it, and the story was crowned with bravas—a true "incident in real life."

While this went on in one part of the apartment, and Monsieur Desjeux, the spirited proprietor of the adjacent gambling-rooms, swore, and raved, and tore his hair in a corner, declaring himself ruined, and vowing vengeance upon the runaways, one of the waiters, in another, was turning over and examining poor Amy's summer wardrobe—the pretty light dresses which had looked so well on her pretty figure, but at which the attentive landlord gloomed, as of value quite inadequate to the debt owing to himself; while some women stood about, anxious to see everything that could be seen, and calculating with energetic whispers what bargains might be had when these were sold.

Through all this doleful desecration and exposure of their young countrywoman's apartment, the kind-hearted Walkingdens passed silently, too much disturbed by the sight to talk to each other.

When *he* was about to advance to the landlord, *she* drew him aside to look at the baby—still asleep, unconscious in its innocence, laid in the pretty cradle which the mother's dainty girlish taste had decorated for her child. The good man, who pretended to be by no means foolish about babies, looked at the infant till something dimmed his eyes, and rose up choking to his throat. The pathos of its unconsciousness touched him to the heart. He turned round in time, as he congratulated himself, to keep all suspicion of his weakness from his wife, but that good woman was quick-sighted, especially when she had a motive, and knew exactly what the handkerchief was for, and why he blew his nose. Like a wise general she said nothing, she let him go to the landlord to make his inquiries, she listened at a little distance, still bending over the cradle, and with an inexpressible thrill at her heart, rocking it softly when the infant moved in its sleep.

To this group, in spite of himself, Mr. Walkingden turned his eyes. The *bonne* standing a little apart, with her neat snow-white cap and dark, vivacious face, reading hope and good fortune for her nursling with the black eyes that made such quick and unobtrusive inquiries, and, leaning over the child, his wife.

There are some women who are always incomplete, and always look incomplete, until nature or accident places a child in their arms. Mrs. Walkingden, though she was childless, was one of these. Somehow, she seemed to soften and brighten and refine by an inexplicable influence as she bent over this cradle. The tears, and the smiles, and the tender commotion in her face, gave an almost beauty to those homely features which had never pretended to anything more than comeliness, even in their youth.

Once more the good man was moved; visions of a child's voice in his own house, and a child's step by his side, and a child's hand in his, stole away his attention even from what he heard, the answers to his own earnest questions. He tried

to turn obstinately away, but somehow did not manage it. His wife, who had been his wife for more than ten years, and about whom he was not in the very least sentimental, seemed by some inexplicable magic endeared to him suddenly. At last he turned his back on the whole scene, and tried to interest himself exclusively in the story; he said, "pooh, pooh," and put himself down. However, there was nothing, save details, to be ascertained; the facts of the case were as his wife had reported them. The father of the deserted child had lost money to a large amount, had come back hurriedly to the hotel, remained awhile in his own apartment, and then gone out again, accompanied by his wife, both of them wearing, as one of the waiters remarked, wraps sufficiently warm for a much colder evening than that genial August night.

The investigations of the servants of the inn had now discovered that every trinket possessed by the young wife, and every valuable which could be easily carried, had been taken away, and they had further ascertained that the pair left Hesse immediately by the short line of railway which led to a town on the Rhine. Messengers were *intended* to be despatched after them, when all the slow continental customs imperative in the first place had been complied with; in the meantime there was no pursuit, and the landlord, anxious only to remunerate himself, found nothing better to do than to turn over poor Amy's dresses and ascertain what value might be there.

"But suppose they should return? a gentleman may be absent for a day—or a night," said Mr. Walkingden, "without having his honor doubted and his name disgraced. Have you any real reason in the world to believe that Mr. Crawshaw—Crawley—what is his name?—will not come back, or send back to pay his debts, and fetch his child? Surely," added the good man, warming a little, "a delay of a few days is owing to the credit of an Englishman's name."

The landlord paused, somewhat puzzled. He could not say anything against the *possibility* of the Englishman's return; he dared not say anything against the credit of an Englishman's name; but he was perfectly convinced that Crawford would not come back to face Monsieur Desjeux, and

that his only means of partially paying himself were those which he was adopting. However, the landlord was wise in his generation. He hastened to say that if his esteemed guest was the absent gentleman's friend, that was quite a different matter. He was perfectly content to stay all his proceedings, and await the possible return of Monsieur, if it was at the request of Monsieur Walkingden.

"It is only justice," said the honest Englishman hastily. "Give him time to come back or send back—don't decide against him at once, let him have a day or two—say a week—it is the merest justice; and I dare say you'll find yourself saved from a very unpleasant position when he comes back, as come or send, I should say he was certain to do. Give the man time!"

The landlord was only too happy—any amount of time! a week, a month, it did not matter to him, so long as it was done at the request of Monsieur Walkingden. Perhaps Monsieur Walkingden perceived by this time the snare into which he had fallen, for he bit his lip and went back to his wife and the cradle. With the most marvellous celerity the room was cleared of all the intruders, Monsieur Desjeux himself being prevailed upon to retire, and the English strangers were left with the child and the nurse alone. The landlord was too wise to lose such a beautiful opportunity of putting the debt of his runaway guest upon substantial shoulders. When everybody was gone Mr. Walkingden looked a little foolish. He saw by this time at least the amount of responsibility into which he had drawn himself.

"This won't do, Sally," he exclaimed energetically. "I may wish to see justice done to a man, but I won't take up his debts. Look here, now! I don't want the poor young woman's things taken, nor the child turned off on charity, if they're coming back; but I'll not be drawn in for their debts, by George, I won't! and I'll have to go and say so instantly. My dear, you mustn't stay here. I'll pay for the baby and the nurse, God help them, till there's word of the father and mother; but I'd rather you didn't stay here."

"Oh, Sam, look at this darling innocent! can I leave her? and no mother to care for her!" cried his tender-hearted wife.

The good man gave a hurried glance at the child, and did not trust himself to look again.

"Sally, Sally! you don't know what you're drawing me in for," he said in a tone of remonstrance and almost hopeless appeal. "Suppose, now, that we *do* take charge of the child for the meantime, and the father and mother *don't* turn up after all, don't you see what a responsibility we bring on our own shoulders? Why, the people here might turn round upon us, and say it was no affair of theirs; they were going to do it and we prevented them. Ten to one but we brought ourselves in for some provision for the child."

"But, my dear Sam," said Mrs. Walkingden, softly moving the cradle with one hand, laying the other gently upon her husband's arm, and looking up at him with the meekest and most demure face in the world; "you yourself said that you felt sure they would return."

Just then the baby woke—woke as good babies wake—rosy and smiling, putting up its chubby hands. Good Mrs. Walkingden, bursting out crying—why, she herself knew best—lifted the child into her longing arms before Victorine could interfere, and stood triumphant, with the baby in her bosom. Her husband turned away without another word.

"Handles it as if she had been used to them all her life!" was his unconscious reflection as he hurried away; "and the little thing not a bit afraid." The vision would not leave his eyes.

CHAPTER X.

"But, Sally, Sally, my dear, good woman! we know nothing about its friends. What in all the world shall we do with it? Consider the responsibility!" cried the betrayed husband in a desperate appeal.

"Don't say *it*, Mr. Walkingden, when you speak of this *dear little girl*!" said his virtuous wife.

"Well, well, I confess she is a pretty little thing. I confess I've been very much taken in about the father and mother; but consider the responsibility, Sally. No doubt there's the Infant Orphan Asylum, and St. Ann's; we're pretty good subscribers. To be sure! I knew you would fire up at the mention of them; but for Heaven's sake, my dear Sally, consider what you're taking upon yourself! If we keep the child, we'll have to provide for her. It's a burden for life. We're very well as we are, and very comfortable. How can we tell, if we go burdening ourselves with other people's children, where it will end or how it may turn out?"

"Bless her dear heart, she's a great deal too young to know that she's 'other people's children,'" cried good Mrs. Walkingden, kissing the baby whom she held in her arms, an eloquent, though for the moment, silent junior counsel on her side of the question; "she's your baby and mine, Samuel, if you do but say the word."

"No, nothing of the sort," cried her husband, energetically; "the truth above everything, Sally. As soon as she is old enough—that is, if I have anything to do with her—she shall know the whole truth."

"Whatever you please, Sam, dear," cried Mrs. Walkingden, seizing upon the unintentional admission. "Whatever you please, my dear good husband; and please God she'll live to be a comfort to your old age, the darling; and bless your kind heart every day of her life."

Saying which, the good woman threw her disengaged arm round her husband's neck, kissed him heartily, thrust the infant into his arms, and went off into a good cry as became the occasion. In which embarrassing circumstances poor Mr. Walkingden, who had received the salute with no greater protest than a "stuff, Sally!" stood helpless, holding the poor little Aprile in his elbow as he had received her, and in mortal terror of letting her fall. The poor child had a temper equal to her fortunes. No fright appeared upon the fair little face. She crowed at her amazed adopting father, and put up the little hand, which as yet she had scarcely learned to aim correctly, to his face. The poor man was overcome, he dropped the baby out of his awkward arms upon the sofa.

heartily thankful to be relieved of her with no harm done; but falling on his knee beside her, looked long into the undiscourageable baby countenance.

"God do so to me, and more also," said the good man, for once in his life betrayed into the subliming circle of extreme emotion, and borrowing instinctively the words which express it best: "God do so to me, and more also, if I deal not truly with this child!" When the words were said, he scrambled up from his knees with an abashed face, and looked round him rather sheepishly. Sensible Mrs. Walkingden both saw and heard, in spite of her "cry;" but, like a wise woman, said nothing save to thank God in her heart that her point was gained.

"And, Sam," she said half an hour after, when her husband's emotion had quite subsided, and her own was only visible in the zeal of her nursing, "if this dear baby had not been intended for us, do you think the darling would have taken to us so kindly? Never once cried, nor put up its sweet lips, my pretty little pet, since the first time I took her in my arms! though I'm not used to babies either; and even you, you cross old man with your glasses, the dear little angel smiles at *you*. What do you call that but Providence? Many a baby I have known, with no greater reason than a new nurse, crying its little eyes out—and this dear pet, through all her troubles, as good as gold!"

"Humph!" said Mr. Walkingden. Now that it was all over, and he had yielded, he meant to make himself a little disagreeable, as a good husband should. "There is nothing more easy than to prove that our own will is the will of Providence—after we have got it," he said sententiously. His wife took no notice, she was much more agreeably employed than in listening to wise sayings.

"But they're all over now, my darling!" said the kind woman; "my baby shall not be put upon, nor aggravated any more, but go home to sweet English air, she shall, and walk in the pretty gardens, and have a little carriage of her own, and cakes, and pictures, and toys. That she shall! as soon as she is old enough to play with them—and learn to speak pretty little words, and love her old papa and

mamma instead of the other ones—so she shall, my darling child!”

“Sally,” said Mr. Walkingden severely, “I would advise you not to put any such foolish fancies into the little thing’s head. To be sure, she’s too young to know what nonsense you are talking to her, but I’ll have her brought up very plainly, you may rely upon *that*.”

“Boh!” said Mrs. Walkingden softly, under her breath; as if *she* did not know better! as if it was likely he could take in his wife so easily! as if she could not tell already who it would be who would spoil the child! So she kept on caressing and playing with the infant without further notice of this interruption. Already the good woman looked five years younger. She had a light muslin dress on, all frills and flounces, “for baby’s sake,” because, of course, as everybody must perceive, she could not nurse Aprile, six months old, all day long, in her good brown silk dress. Then some accident of their sport had thrown off her cap, which was no great harm, considering the pretty light brown-hair, nicely arranged and abundant, which was to be seen beneath. Mr. Walkingden, in his plain way, was fond of his wife; to see her looking so well, and looking so happy, made the good man glad. He thought, with a homely sentiment, not unfamiliar to people subject to the weakness of affection, that he would like to have a picture of her, just as she looked at that moment—“with the child.” With the child!—already the adopted baby took its place and held its infant sway among them. Without the child she would never again look a complete person, that tender-hearted woman. When Mr. Walkingden went out, as he had to do presently, he contrived to pass very closely by the two, to pinch, “baby’s” cheek, and, half caressing, half in jest, to pull lightly his wife’s hair.

“I did not know you had so much hair, Sally, and not bad-looking either,” he said, patting her uncovered head; “I don’t see that you’ve much occasion for that thing there.”

The thing so disrespectfully designated was Mrs. Walkingden’s cap. She wore no more caps for a long time after; she put on joyous dresses, light-colored and flowery; she wanted

"baby" to know nothing but brightness in those sweet baby days; and, unconsciously to herself, in the fair little adopted child renewed her youth.

As for Victorine, though Mrs. Walkingden, as a general rule, equally dreaded and disliked French maids, whom she held to be capable of every species of harm and diabolical mischief, from corrupting their mistress's faith to seducing their master's affections—Victorine, who had been so good to "baby," was to stay with the child, and the good-natured *bonne* heard the decision with great content. Her new mistress and she held long conversations together of the funniest kind. Victorine paid Mrs. Walkingden the very flattering compliment of understanding her French, and Mrs. Walkingden attended Victorine reverently at baby's toilette, handing her everything she wanted, and getting insight into that lengthy and complicated operation. They lingered at Hesse as long as any chance remained that Crawford or his wife would return to claim the child; then, well pleased, turned their faces homewards, "to get settled quietly before the cold weather, for babies are so liable to cold," Mrs. Walkingden said, while her husband stood looking at her with a half-comic, half-admiring wonder, supposing it came by nature, and asking what the deuce *she* knew about children; though not even the good woman herself was more entirely pleased and happy.

"But, by-the-by, to be sure we can't go on always calling her baby, and presently she'll require a name. What's her name?"

"Well, Sam, to tell the truth, it's rather an outlandish name," said Mrs. Walkingden, "and I'm afraid you'll wish to change it. The sweet thing was born in April, it appears, and they called her Aprile. If it was not so out of the way, it's pretty enough; but I thought you would not like it when I heard it first."

"Like it—Aprilee!—stuff!—Why could not they call it something honest and sensible like your own name? No, I don't want to change it; I've no right. While she's with us let's call her Sally, my dear, after yourself; I know no one has so good a claim."

"Sally is very well for me," said Mrs. Walkingden, who

was by no means proud of her homely name; "or Sara, Samuel, as you know I always spelt it when I was a young woman; but I won't have that sweet innocent called after me—Sally!—is she a bit like it? No, no, wait awhile; 'baby' will do very well for a long time, and then, to be sure, we can think it over. Aprile is such a very *uncommon* name."

"My dear, she shall never be Aprile in my house," said the peremptory Samuel; "but never mind, there is time enough; as you say, we can wait."

And just as Amy entered, in her changed condition, the pretty Willeham cottage, Amy's baby, within ten miles of her, came happily home.

CHAPTER XI.

A YEAR after another little life came to Amy's chilled bosom and empty arms.

"Bless your heart! didn't I say you'd have a many on 'em, if so be as you wouldn't fret," said nurse Patmore, once more proudly regnant in her full dignity of office in Amy's room; with an armful of flowing muslin, giving breadth to her outline, and her voice tuned to congratulations as naturally and as kindly as it had formerly been to condolences and sympathy. "I can't say as you've taken my advice, ma'am, as you should have done; but, Lord bless us, if we was judged as we deserves, what would become on us all? And look here at your bonny boy!—ain't he an armful? I've seen many a smaller three month old. Now, I'm not agoing away till you've given him one smile. I said to myself, when I knew it was you, ma'am, as I was called to, 'She'll not look dismal no more, *my* lady won't, when she has the babe in her arms.' But, bless us all, *there's* tears! and, if ever I heard wheels in my life, that's the doctor at the door—and what in all the airth will he say to *me*?"

The tears were wiped off hurriedly before Mr. Fordham

made his appearance. The doctor came in briskly, as became a man who had assisted at a joyful event, likely to have an important effect on the comfort of the family, but curiously withal, with a sharp glance in his eyes, and all his wits about him. "I wonder what form the old hallucination will take now—whether it will show itself," had been his private cogitation, as he approached the room; and he came fully prepared to make observations on those curious phenomena of physical and mental science, concerning which this young mother had already unconsciously afforded him so much information. Unconsciously, poor soul! and in her sad simplicity, had betrayed the doctor into a hundred false conclusions. He was almost more curious now than he had ever been.

"All going on comfortably, nurse? Your lady getting up her spirits—not much fear of that now, I suppose. No?—hum!—low still?—that's bad; frightened, of course. Thinks he'll do it again!" he said to himself, as he approached the bed;—"an unquestionable mania, poor creature! trust it won't go further this time. Good morning, Mrs. Crawford; getting on very nicely, I hear, and very proud, of course, of so fine a child? I can tell you his father is—quite elated I found him to-day—slipped a double fee into my hand, and thanked me as if it was all my doing. Ha! ha! I wish I could see you look a little brighter here; come, come, get up your heart! What are you frightened of now? look me in the face, my dear young lady, and tell *me*. Because you've lost the first, you're nervous and afraid to be glad about your child, eh?—now, come, confide in me."

"It is not exactly that, doctor. No; I can't tell exactly what it is: it's only I'm very foolish, and low, and have no heart," cried poor Amy, with a melancholy sigh out of the depths of her breast.

"But you must get a heart, and a happy one too," said the doctor. "Come, come! I never have nervous patients. I dare say, now, your first baby was puny; it very often happens so; no comparison with this child, my dear madam. Look at the fellow—what a chest! what limbs! whereas, in all likelihood, your first child——"

Nurse Sarah gave the doctor so violent a pull by the coat,

that he turned round in sudden amaze, and scarcely heard Amy's feeble, vehement exclamation, "Don't, doctor; I cannot bear it!" in the entire bewilderment of finding himself thus corrected by the nurse. Looking, if not daggers, at least lancets and scalpels at her, Mr. Fordham returned to his patient, but did not resume his discourse, fortunately, at the exact point where he had left it off. "For the child's sake, and for your own sake, my dear young lady, you must make an effort and recover your spirits. I understand you mean to nurse him yourself; now only think how unfortunate to communicate this sad melancholy of yours to this splendid boy, and make a moping child of him. Come, come! you have very good health, fortunately; a kind husband, a lovely child, a pleasant home, and kind neighbors, who will rejoice to see you happy. If there is anything particular which makes you nervous about the baby, tell me all about it, and I'll set it right for you. Come, out with it! there's something on your mind. I wish I saw you as happy as the father is about this famous child."

"He looks happy, does he, doctor?" said Amy, wistfully.

"Ah! here it is at last," thought the clever doctor—"Happy! delighted—as proud of his heir as a man can be," he said aloud.

Amy made another long pause.

"And you'll take care of baby, if—if anything should ail him, or anything should happen," she said slowly.

The poor young creature was afraid to put too much meaning in her words; and yet so deeply, tremulously anxious to interest her auditors for her child.

"Pooh, pooh! nonsense! nothing will ail him—nothing shall happen; loop up this curtain here, nurse, and let us have a little more light. What! you don't care about the light? What *do* you care about?" cried the puzzled doctor. "Can't you manage to amuse your lady somehow, Sarah? Why, woman, I've known you have no end of resources; can you do nothing here? Give her books, work—anything in the world to take her mind off herself."

"It's early days yet, doctor, for work and books," said nurse Sarah, *resenting* Mr. Fordham's look.

"Hold your tongue; you don't know anything about it; if you can't divert her mind, or somebody else for you, she'll lose her head or die. Terrible things those hallucinations," said the doctor, in an under-tone, shaking his head; "frightful, ineffaceable impressions. God knows what that man deserves for tearing the young creature from her dead child, and she a nurse as well as a mother; she'll never recover it—never! and it was all kindness, of course: oh, kindness! Cruelty kills its thousands, and kindness its tens of thousands. Mind you watch her constantly, and let me know of any change. I'll send Miss Lucy over from the Rectory with a heap of novels and fancy-work. God help the simple soul! if wisdom won't do her any good, foolishness may: we can but try."

The last part of this speech being muttered to himself as he went down the stairs, Mr. Fordham went away, leaving nurse Sarah considerably frightened and very doubtful of her powers in case "*my lady*" should go out of her mind, as the doctor said. But poor Amy lay so quiet after the commotion was over, received the nurse's attentions with such calm, dewy, melancholy eyes; took the infant into her bosom, if with little joy, still with such motherlike tenderness, that the simple woman, who had no theory to support, was soon reassured and set at ease again. When she had laid the baby beside his mother, Sarah went chattering about the room, preparing that always safe and beneficial diversion, "a cup of tea." If that did not soothe her patient, nothing would; and then it soothed Sarah at the same time. But she was not unmindful of the doctor's exhortations. She launched out with great unction into descriptions of the last novelties and splendors in baby wardrobes which had come under her observation; she tried hard to stimulate Amy's ambition in respect to baby's christening robe and cap. As it was a boy—a son and heir—they oughtn't to be common, no more they oughtn't; and Sarah had the satisfaction of rousing her pale patient into a momentary discussion of the relative merits of lace and embroidery as she drank her tea.

Mr. Fordham, in the meanwhile, had assaulted without hesitation the husband downstairs, alarming him with dreadful prognostications of evil. Crawford listened with great

composure, and no great apparent anxiety. A momentary start when the idea of insanity resulting from Amy's low spirits, was suggested to him, was the only evidence of emotion he showed. He *was* afraid of a mad wife, to whom he should be bound, with no power either to release or to avenge himself upon her ; but the thought was only momentary ; when the doctor had ended, he was quite able to answer with calmness,—

"Don't you think, doctor, that the best thing will be to leave her in absolute quiet for a day or two, and see what nature will do ?" said Crawford, with a coolness so complete that it was almost contemptuous when compared with Mr. Fordham's excitement ; "I confess that is what I should be inclined to try."

"Ah! perhaps you think you know the occasion of this very startling state of things—so totally unusual in a young mother," said the doctor, with professional scorn.

"Yes," said Crawford, gravely, "I believe I do."

"Then let me tell you, you know a very dismal truth," cried the doctor, rising ; "a cruel state to see a young creature plunged into. Pity, but you had known it a little sooner, and freed yourself at least from any blame in the matter ! These hallucinations, sir, are never overcome—never, sir ! I said so at first, and my conviction is confirmed now,—that poor young lady, sir, will tremble every time you approach her baby ; that is what ails her, sir ; she thinks you too kher former child from her, because then you would not permit nature to have its own way ; and mark my words, she is terrified for you now."

Crawford attended the doctor to the door with the most perfect civility, without either denying or assenting to what he said ; as, indeed, Mr. Fordham left him little room. When he closed the door upon him, he smiled angrily and bitterly.

"Fool!" he said to himself ; "yes, fool ! what desperate mockery were these guesses and conclusions of blind Science." He alone, and the sufferer in the upper room, knew what was hallucination and what was true.

CHAPTER XII.

BUT whether it was the advent of the Rector's daughter with all her new patterns of fancy work, and three novels of three volumes each, or the ceaseless attentions of nurse Sarah, or the assurances which she received of the pleasure which her husband took in the advent of the child, or all together, it is certain that Amy did recover, if not rapidly, at least at a very orthodox rate of progression, and was shortly again at the head of affairs in her own house, with nurse and doctor happily departed. Her life had settled down during the year's interval; she was by temper and early training a good housewife, the little house was admirably managed in spite of all the indifference with which her husband sometimes accused her; and when Amy's thoughts grew too many for her, she found this a great resource. Her days, changed as they were, were full of occupation; she worked, she mended, she kept her little accounts, she superintended her maids with a gravity worthy twice her age, and she was content in her blank, calm, uncommunicating way, and did not seem to have a trace left in her of the pretty Amy, the gay Amy, the happy little mother who, *that* night, only a little more than a year ago, sang her first-born child to sleep.

This child now, whom without great fondness or any demonstration of maternal pride, she watched incessantly, had a mother ten years older in reality than that mother who nursed Aprile; but as she said nothing to anybody of any troubles she might have, and the people in Willesham had never known her otherwise, she only passed for a very quiet young woman, a model wife, and yet rather a dull companion for that very superior man her husband, a person whom nobody except nurse Sarah felt any great regard for, and whom even the exemplary Rector's wife declared in an incautious moment to be too *good* to awaken any interest in any creature, "meaning, you understand," the excellent woman said, when she perceived that her own Lucy and some other such

had received the unwary words with plaudits—almost as unwary—"meaning, my dears, too even, too blank, too faultless, without any lights and shadows about her; not too *good*—nobody can be too good;" an explanation which was as successful as most other explanations.

Poor Amy neither knew nor cared what people were thinking; she watched her baby with an incessant melancholy watchfulness, ruled her house, kept her husband's table and his linen in perfect order, received what money he gave her, and managed it so that it was enough, never meddled with his affairs, or asked for anything; rather shrank from himself a little, grew awkward when she felt he was looking at her, and found a difficulty in expressing what she wanted to say, when *he* listened; but barring these latter peculiarities, which are somewhat irritating to a man sometimes, what would half the husbands in Christendom desire better for a wife?

But as for Crawford, if his wife doted no more on the baby who had taken the place of her lost child, he seemed to have changed characters with her: little Edward's slightest ailment made his father nervous, little Edward's smiles delighted his heart; he was as proud of the boy as if he had brought some fairy gift of conciliation in his baby hands. The first germ of domestic love or home pleasure which this man had ever known came to him in his child; and the uncaressing maternal cares of his wife raised in him a certain opposition and half-resentful determination to make the boy independent of so cold a mother. After *his* birth, Crawford did two important pieces of business, neither of which Amy knew anything of, as indeed she knew nothing of any of his movements. The one was a letter to his father, written with great skill and cleverness, confessing a private marriage made some time ago, which he had only found courage to acknowledge when his own boy taught him how to prize more fully the love and blessing of his father. His pretty little wife, he grieved to say, had fallen into low spirits and delicate health on the loss of their first infant (of which he spoke in the slightest possible manner), and had not even now recovered either, as he should wish to see her. She was the prettiest little fairy imaginable when he married her, and he confessed that one of his reasons

for delaying this communication so long, was his desire to see her restored to her first beauty before introducing her to his family; "for, of course, my dear father, it was a foolish match," wrote the candid husband; "but alas! one must always buy one's experience at first hand, and wisdom comes only too late. Pray tell the girls, and my excellent brother Joe, who has been wiser than I, as indeed he always was; but what does it matter whom a poor wretch of a younger son may happen to marry? Pray communicate my confession and contrition also to my kind uncle Molyneux. Tell him I have tasted both the sweets and bitters of life since I saw him, and that the only excuse I can offer to him and to you, is a prince of a boy, who, I trust, will turn out a better fellow than his father, and be a credit to your name."

This letter—calculated to call out most strongly the sympathy and pity of his sisters, who were very potential at home, for "poor Charley's unfortunate marriage;" poor Charley believing in his heart that they were much more likely to befriend him because his letter conveyed a distinct impression that his experiment had been a failure, and brought him no happiness—he despatched when little Edward was about six weeks old, not without hopes of an invitation following thereupon.

A few days later he went upon a private expedition to London. There he took his way into the City, to a quarter totally unknown to fashion, and gave orders to a bookseller to procure a set for August and September of the previous year, of the *Hesse Zeitung*. When he got these papers, which was not for some time, he hastened with them to an obscure coffee-house, and examined them with some eagerness, but no emotion. There he read his own disappearance and the romantic story of the deserted child. There he found the little dramas of conjecture, which assigned other reasons than the patent and visible one which needed no assistance, to his sudden flight, the sudden discovery of Madame's "error," the abandonment of the child. He smiled as he read, but with a savage smile; that arrow, contemptible as it was, wounded him; then another Englishman appeared on the scene—a Monsieur Walkingden, Walkdening, Walkerham, a rich

benevolent Milor, who adopted the infant and had carried it off to his own castle in the English mists. Then the story faded into scraps of gossip. How Monsieur the fugitive had been seen in Vienna, in Florence, in Copenhagen, in a dozen different quarters, and so the novelty died out of it, and the journal forgot it, and the story was over.

Crawford folded up two papers which contained an absurd account of the stranger who had adopted his child, folded them up in an envelope and sealed it. Then he carefully destroyed all the others, and then, as coolly as though this had been the most ordinary piece of business possible, returned home, returned to the innocent child whom he really loved, and the poor stupified wife, whose heart had been killed in her by that dreadful episode in her young existence, the record of which he coldly laid on the table beside him, and when he was ready put away in his desk, she present all the while.

All the remnant of life and vigor which she possessed, would poor Amy have given for the contents of that blank envelope; in it lay the only medicine which could, if anything could, have yet delivered her heart. No one knew that so well as her husband did, who coolly, in her presence, yet with precautions that she should never find them, buried them away.

And so ended that early chapter, which no one but themselves knew of, in their life.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOTWITHSTANDING the skilful adaptation of Mr. Crawford's letter to the family whom it was designed to affect, no immediate result followed. Father and uncle were either less placable or more indifferent than the former favorite of the family had supposed. His allowance continued to be paid to him regularly, short business notes from his brother kept him informed of the changes which took place in the paternal

household, but no invitation came, nothing except the merest chance of acknowledgment that there was such a person as his wife, and not the least notice of his child. This state of things continued, to his unspeakable disgust and vexation, for rather more than two years, during which interval another infant, a second boy, had come to the Willesham cottage. Then the long looked-for invitation came at last. Joe Crawford, happier than his brother in everything else, was less fortunate in this one respect. He had married prudently a good wife whom everybody approved, and whose own belongings were not to be despised; but the two had already settled into the cosy self-regard of acknowledged childlessness. If they had ever hoped on the subject, by this time they had given up hoping, and every successive year made "Charley's boy" a more important individual.

So the family forgiveness was accorded at last. Uncle Molyneux—who "never pretended that he had any right to be consulted—how could *he* presume to advise a young fellow in the choice of a wife?"—held out longer and with a certain morose resistance; but the invitation conveyed by jolly brother Joe was encouraging and hopeful.

"Things will come all right presently—especially if she turns out as pretty as you tell us," wrote the cheerful Joseph: "accordingly, we'll expect you, with all your traps, including nursery, the Saturday before Christmas. Maria sends her kind regards to your wife, and will see that the rooms are warm, and all that sort of thing, for the babies. A pleasant journey to you, old boy. Bring down anything new in the way of books you can lay your hands on—nothing so likely to propitiate Gerty as a new book."

"Gerty!" exclaimed Crawford aloud, with a whistle of contempt and amazement,—*"Gerty!"*

Gerty had grown up since his time. Gerty had been a little girl in pinafores, scarcely too dignified to be propitiated by a new doll when he was last at home: what the deuce had Gerty to do with the matter?

A quiet "What, Charles?" from his wife, made him aware that he had spoken aloud.

He turned round to her with a little impatience. "If she is

as pretty as you tell us!" He looked at her with his critical cold eyes: was she pretty at all? Could anybody see anything in her but the commonplace young woman, the farmer's daughter, which she was in reality? Crawford, who had married poor Amy for her bloom, her simplicity, her freshness, her girlish unlikeness to himself and the artificial world with which he was acquainted, turned his disenchanted eyes upon her now with an angry intolerance of her paleness and melancholy. He said to himself that there was no real thought in that face which looked so thoughtful, that no serious quality had come in compensation for the pleasant ones that were lost; and with a serious bitterness blamed her in his heart with a condemnation not to be expressed in words, not only for her loss of beauty and life, but even for its cause. What had *he* done that this ghost's face should be his perpetual companion;—he, who since that catastrophe at Hesse, had withdrawn himself from his former society and habits, and lived a recluse's life, with those dismal eyes always opposite to him, brooding over the one perpetual recollection which he was not to be permitted to forget?

He turned away in disgust, and folded up his letter, hesitating to carry his family, to carry *her* for home inspection, to be rated as she deserved. Pretty!—who could find out a vestige of beauty in that dead face?

Nevertheless, there was more in it than appeared to *his* eyes. Amy was pale, subdued, gentle, at times she was a little awkward, but she had recovered herself in a great degree, though *he* never found it out. Nothing could possibly give her heart and courage sufficient to subdue her settled grief and conceal it. She was not a woman of fortitude, and had few heroic qualities, poor soul! but her paleness was not ghostly, nor her melancholy gloom.

Only two-and-twenty, with her two babies, she made none of the fond demonstrations of a young mother. But her care of them and thought for them never intermitted, and even *that* gave a certain tone to her face. She was always quiet, not always listening, but so still that no baby exclamation could escape her, or cry be unheard; and the singular sweet human interest which this gave her might well have touched

any heart accessible to such emotions. She was not firm, nor sprightly, nor able to be a support to any one; that was visibly impossible. She was a weak woman, easily troubled by observation, distrustful of herself, without courage, without elasticity. All this was perfectly evident to look at her; but it was by no means so certain as her husband concluded, that his family would find no beauty nor pleasantness in poor Amy. She who interrupted nobody, affronted nobody, said nothing she could help saying, was likely enough to be acceptable in the family gathering, where so many people would give and take offence, assert their own rights, and deny those of others.

When her husband had considered it again and made up his mind finally to accept, he informed his wife of the invitation with great *empressement*. Three years before, in those days when Amy, as she said pathetically, "was young"—it seemed such a long time ago!—she would have been greatly fluttered and excited by the news. Now if she shrank a little more into herself at the moment of hearing it, that was all the sign of emotion she gave. If the birth of her children scarcely roused her, what effect could such an event as this have upon the heart which had been frightened into a solitude so far beneath the course of ordinary things? She asked a few questions; how they should travel, when they should set out, whether she could take the children's maids with them, and how far off it was—nothing more.

Half amazed and half angry, Crawford watched her preparing the infants' dresses, and renewing their tiny sashes and shoes; but she did not ask, and he never volunteered to tell, who were the different members of this family whom she was about to meet for the first time, or what her reception might be amongst them.

She remembered hearing their names in the early days of her marriage, when her own family were deeply interesting to herself, and she could not understand her husband's indifference: but now she, too, had given up her own people, discouraged in the outset by the natural alienation of marriage and maternity; after a while losing all heart for the correspondence, nor even caring to remember her old home, she

had grown, as a natural consequence, entirely indifferent to her husband's.

Amy, however, was not quite so unnatural as this account of her might infer: her home had been with relations less near than father and mother; she was in reality an orphan and an only child; and it was in the midst of the family of her yeoman uncle, the sole feminine blossom among six stalwart cousins, that her husband had seen her first. When Crawford's sisters married, and his brother formed a distinct household, Amy had never been informed; she did not know what kind of people they were, nor the nature of the criticism to which she would be subjected, though she was woman enough to know that criticized she must be.

When she had finished all her preparations she threw herself down wearily into a chair before her dressing-table to prepare for dinner. Then, for the first time, as she saw her tired face in the glass, a thought of herself came into her mind. "They will think he has made a very poor choice," she said to herself, with a sigh of heaviness; and instinctively it occurred to her what a sad difference had come upon that poor face at which she gazed. Looking at it, Amy, too, like her husband, missed its bloom and its comeliness, and wonderingly tried to recollect how old she was. What would they think of her? Perhaps happy girls of her own age who were not married, and had never known any trouble—the two things went together to Amy's simplicity.

Then she recalled with a passing wonder the compliments with which her husband, before he was her husband, had astonished her sweet youth—those compliments which embarrassed her and pleased her, and were all set down to the flattering score of his "partiality" first, and then his love—the dearest compliments of all. The ghost of a smile came on Amy's lip as that thought glided across her mind. There was no bitterness in her; if there had, it would have been bitter that smile, for, slight as her insight was, she had somehow found out by this time that it was not her husband's love which made him think her beautiful, but only her beauty which had made him suppose himself in love—a sadly different matter, as women know.

At that moment he entered the room behind her, saw her face in the glass, and detected that smile, if smile it was to be called. It irritated him, who was in a condition to be irritated about anything, and he had come up with the dread purpose of a conversation—a thing which Amy always feared.

"I am glad to see you find the sight so pleasant; few people think their faces so satisfactory," he said, hastily.

Amy drew herself away from the glass with a startled nervous motion, and sudden, painful color.

"It was something I was thinking about," she said, hesitating a great deal, and even trembling a little. He looked at her a moment with a certain strange intolerance and impatience.

"That was an event, indeed," he said: "might I ask what the happy thought was? perhaps an agreeable anticipation of the conquests you will make at Rookley Place?"

Amy made no answer. Her pretty hair had been all about her shoulders when her husband entered. She began rapidly to put it up in its usual braids, and said nothing.

"Because that is what I wish to speak to you about," he said. "Have you made any change in your dress? have you ordered yourself anything fit to wear at Rookley? and how do you mean to do about a maid?"

"A maid? I have never required a maid," said Amy.

"You have never been in my father's house, so far as I am aware," said her husband. "That will be necessary while you are there; and the dresses, how about these?"

"I thought, as I had everything I could want, I should do very well," said Amy, hesitating more and more, and speaking with a pause and breathless interval between every two or three words.

"You are very modest in your wants,—a brown gown and a blue one, I suppose; and this, of course, is your d—d unselfishness and humility," cried Crawford angrily, "which must be exhibited in season and out of season! Why the deuce can't you order what you want yourself, and look after your own concerns like a rational creature? Certainly you do not trouble yourself much with mine! I take you to Rookley because I can't help it—because a man with children must

carry his wife with him, even though she does choose to live in a constant fit of sulks ; but you must show me that you are presentable, and fit to be seen there, or, by Jove, I'll take the babies and leave you behind !”

His wife sprang suddenly up before him, grasping in one hand the shining hair which she had been about to arrange, pale, terrified, desperate, with a look which he had never seen on the face of any living creature before.

“No,” she said with a gasp, “you will never do *that* again.”

For the moment he shrank before her, forgetting who she was, and what she was—his wife and mother of his children. For the moment poor Amy, imposing and wonderful in her desperation, was only a female creature whom some one threatened to deprive of her young. He had drawn back a step in involuntary acknowledgment of that wild primitive emotion. It startled him ; but he recovered his advantage very presently, smiled, and said this at least was a new development. Then it was Amy's turn to shrink, it was Amy's turn to avert her head with a sudden intolerance. She could bear anything in the world better than that cold criticising eye.

The result of this, however, was that she received orders to accompany him the next day to London, to order the necessary dresses, and did so with the bewildering addition of a maid whom she did not want, and who was a much finer person than her mistress ; and it was with this increased equipment that Amy set out on the 20th of December to see her husband's family for the first time, and stand her trial as his wife.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROOKLEY PLACE was a modern house with the ruined remains of an old one standing within sight of its drawing-room windows, and conferring a certain dignity and authenticity upon the family pedigree by means of its ivy and its broken turrets. The present building was not remarkable, but the situation was good, and the most had been made of the picturesque but not very extensive grounds which surrounded it. A low range of soft English hills, one of which bore on its summit a little old shepherd's church, very quaint, very rude, and of great antiquity, rose on the opposite side of a little river which ran through Rookley Park; and the private demesne of the Crawfords extended, with many pretty slopes and undulations, almost as far as the hills which *made* the landscape. A pretty peaceful rural scene—great trees, ancient and time-honored, old grassy terraces, graceful and old-fashioned, laughing new flower-gardens adapted to the taste of the time and the young ladies, united to temper and sweeten that full breath of the country which surrounded the house, and which is life to those to the manner born. It was not easy to tell by the morsel of ruin which remained, what had been the size and pretensions of the former dwelling; but the irregular mass itself, with its tufts of dark-leaved elder thrusting out from the empty windows, and its wreaths of blunt luxuriant ivy climbing to the very point of that curious little turreted crest, which might have been a lantern or a belfry, or two or three other things, was a picturesque object from the house, and a pleasant excitation to the family pride.

Amy had little leisure for observation as the carriage which had been sent to meet them rolled in at the gate; and Crawford, absorbed in speculations how they should be received, and curious—with a mixed conjugal sentiment not easily explainable, a singular blending of the quiet satisfaction of matrimonial dislike, in supposing an unfavorable judgment,

with an angry anticipatory defiance in case anybody should venture to despise too openly anything belonging to himself—about the opinion likely to be formed by his family of his wife, had little of either leisure or inclination to enjoy the home landscape, and felt no particular softening of heart in presence of the scenes familiar to his youth. He did observe with a sharp eye alterations which had been made since he was last here, making unconscious comments upon them as he did so; but his mind was too much taken up by personal concerns to be liable to any melting or sentimentality.

The great door was opened coldly by a strange servant. The ladies were at home, in the drawing-room; but nobody came to the door to welcome the returned son and the new members of the family. Amy would have thought it strange had not everything been strange.

They had scarcely entered the hall when Crawford ordered the infants to be sent at once to their own apartments, and gave his wife his arm. He said nothing to her by way of encouragement, but with something of a haughty defiance in his face, led her into the presence of his family.

Hitherto Charley's arrival had been a family jubilee; he felt the difference keenly, and resented with a sharp annoyance and pain, not only that his wife, but even the servants should be able to observe the coldness of his reception. It glanced into his mind, as he went along those long passages, how it would be discussed in the servants' hall, and circulated among other servants, till the whole county knew how like a stranger the once favorite son had re-entered his father's house. Amy, meanwhile, glided on by his side, betraying no feeling in *her* white face—caring little, to tell the truth, what reception she might meet with, feeling herself the one person about whom nobody was interested, and whom the people in this house regarded at best with a depreciating curiosity.

A young woman strong in love and the confidence of beginning life might well have met a disapproving and critical family with mingled fear and courage; but a woman who has lost confidence in her existence altogether, and who knows very well that the husband who supports her is her worst and severest critic, has too little hope in anything to be subject to

fear. There was no quickening of color in Amy's cheek as she entered Rookley. She looked anxiously after the children as they were carried upstairs, but displayed no anxiety when she herself advanced to the formidable drawing-room, where she was to be put upon her trial. All the self-possession of a woman of the world was conferred upon Amy, by her absence of all expectation. The agitation, such as it was, fell to the share of her husband: she was not excited out of her ordinary calm.

When the new comers entered, the family rose to receive them. The room was large, lighted by three large windows opening upon a terrace; furnished with furniture handsome but faded, and which had never been magnificent. On a large round ottoman in front of the fire sat two ladies, and an old gentleman rose from the corner of the chimney as they went in—a tall old man with a narrow high head, white hair brushed forward from each side to conceal a partial baldness, a thin rim of whisker, also silver white, and the manners of a reserved but courteous man of the world. He came forward extending a long and thin soft hand to his son, as if he had parted from him the morning before.

"How do you do, Charles?—glad to see you at Rookley again. Your brother is out, and you know that I never expose myself to sudden changes of temperature, which is the reason I meet you here, and not at the door. And this, of course, is my daughter-in-law? How do you do, Mrs. Charles? Let me introduce you to Mrs. Crawford, my eldest son's wife, and my daughter Madeline. Sit down, Charles. I hope you have had a comfortable journey, and that my people did not keep you waiting at the railway: rather a new thing to come to Rookley by railway, eh?—but I really think it very advantageous in many respects, especially to people of small income like yourself. Famous Christmas weather, don't you think?—not too warm. Madeline, Mrs. Charles most probably will take some refreshment after her journey. Had lunch, eh? Where's Gertrude? Why is *she* out of the way just at this moment? My dear child, you have surely not forgotten how to ring the bell?"

"I'll do it for you, Madge," said Crawford, interposing

between his nervous sister and the apparently unaccustomed duty. "I trust, sir, *you* have not forgotten that I am no stranger in Rookley, and that it is scarcely necessary to receive me on a formal footing into *your* house, which has been my home all my life."

"Quite a different matter, my dear fellow," said the old gentleman, benignly. "You are now a married man, and the head of another family. Your brother—I am sure to our great advantage and enjoyment," he continued, with a little old-fashioned bow at Mrs. Joseph on the ottoman—"is married also. These events make a great difference in family arrangements. Gertrude! where *is* Gertrude, Madeline!"

As he spoke the door opened, and another member of the family, a young lady of nineteen or twenty, a tall, large girl of splendid form, and remarkable appearance, entered the room. Her figure was so striking, and she seemed to bring so sudden an increase of warmth and vitality into the apartment, that her very dress took a certain importance. She was dressed in some very fine woollen stuff, of the color which ladies call ruby; rich and dark, ornamented with bands and bindings of velvet, with blue ribbons of an equal quality of color at her neck and wrists. Her hair, which was very dark without being black, was arranged in full braids, in a fashion which was not *the* fashion of the time, on each side. She had a vivid fluctuating color, which varied in a singular way as she spoke; her complexion was dark, but of the clearest tone; her eyes also dark, large, brilliant, and vivacious. Her face, full of lights of intelligence and commotion, discoursing from every feature, took a yet additional gleam from the very white small teeth, which the form of her lips disclosed rather too much for beauty. She came in with a rapid firm step, full of the confidence and self-willed energy of early youth, which had never known a curb. It was as easy to perceive by that step, and the erect elastic pride of bearing with which she carried her head, that this young woman, in her limited world, had never yet met with anything too strong for her, nor once come under the conscious pressure of the inevitable, as it was to tell the high natural spirit and undaunted youthful courage with which nature had endowed her.

They all looked at her as she came into the room, even those to whom the sight of Gertrude was an every-day and familiar circumstance of life: she was a person to be looked at, wherever she was seen.

With a certain mixture of admiration, defiance, and even contempt for her youth, and womanhood, and the sovereign air of power which no discipline had ever taught her to conceal, Crawford gazed at his sister, whom he did not know; and with very different eyes his wife turned towards the splendid young creature, who advanced to them so rapidly and firmly.

Amy looked at Gertrude as one who has had her first fall in life looks at another who fears nothing, and knows nothing, and spurns the unknown dangers of a career which is not even begun. The wistfulness, the pity, the half-envying, half-compassionate woman's admiration with which the broken spirit looked upon the strong one, were scarcely less youthful in their sentiment than Gertrude's courage.

Terrible had been the stroke which crushed poor Amy's life within her; but it was still only her first fall. She did not know with the ripe experience of age that such miserable calamities are unusual, and that it was even possible for such a mind as Gertrude's to pass through life unbroken and almost unscathed. Amy knew nothing of that wider and calmer knowledge—she knew only what her own great misfortune had taught her; and looked at the daring young neophyte before her with all the pathetic schooling of her own sore knowledge in her wistful, compassionate, admiring eyes.

"I have ordered lunch, papa," said Gertrude, who had by no means paused to be looked at, but who made this prompt and immediate statement as soon as she entered the room. "How do you do, Charles?—which is my new sister? I beg your pardon," continued the young lady, crossing over at once to where Amy sat, and taking her hand, "for going to see the babies first, because I am very fond of babies, and I am not so sure about new people like my brother Charles and you. They are the sweetest little pets in the world! They are twenty times prettier than Mary's! I knew they were not like Charles, so I made sure they were like you, and that I

should fall in love with you directly; but, after all," said Gertrude, looking closely at the "new sister," who blushed very much, and trembled a little under her scrutiny, and whose other hand her examiner took half unconsciously in an involuntary gesture of protection and encouragement; "they are not very much like you. I don't think you have even got quite well or strong, have you? Never mind! at Rookley we'll take such care of you you'll forget it all."

Forget it all! Amy's cheeks blanched again as they had reddened. Was there anything known here of that misery of her life? She could not make the commonplace answer which ordinary custom had almost brought to her lips. This sudden suggestion of her terrible secret trouble made her sick and faint. The room swam in her eyes. Then she heard her husband's voice, and the familiar sound brought her back to reality—brought her down from the momentary illusion of terror to the cold distinctness of everything around her. The wintry afternoon light, the blazing fire, the strange faces, not unfriendly but unfamiliar—emotion left her at the sound of that accustomed voice.

"Though I am very glad that you should fall in love with my wife, I think you might also spare a little attention for me, Gerty," said the newly arrived brother. "You are a very astounding apparition to my eyes, I can tell you. I have no difficulty with Madeline, and I had the good fortune to know Mrs. Joseph before I knew how lucky Joe was to be; but *you* were in pinafores when I was last at Rookley; *you* had not a thought beyond lessons and bread and butter; you may conceive my amazement now. I suppose your brother Charley is about as great a stranger to you; but you owe me a warmer welcome after an absence of so many years."

"I beg your pardon; I remember you perfectly well; you used to call me a little nuisance, and ask why I was out of the nursery; and I was not little, any more than I am now," cried Gertrude. "You are not a stranger, but I didn't like you; however, if you mind about it, and if you mean to be amiable, I'll try now. I ordered some tea for *you*, and here it comes," she continued, turning to Amy. "I dare say you'd much rather have had it upstairs, and taken your bonnet off and

been comfortable. How foolish of me not to think of that! Never mind, it doesn't matter; let us go now."

"Do, pray, let Mrs. Charles alone, Gerty; she wants to rest, to be sure. This girl has mercury in her veins; she will drag you all over the house if you will let her," said Mrs. Joseph, addressing Amy for the first time, as she rustled past, kindly enough, to pour out some tea for her. "This is not my business, of course, but I mean to save you from Gerty for half an hour or so. You see she is lady paramount, and does as she pleases; and we all want to see the babies. Presently we can all go upstairs."

The happy introduction of a luncheon tray, though only for the refreshment of the travellers, did a great deal for the ease of all parties. Crawford himself, who had been discomfited and affronted in no small degree by the extreme *non-chalance* of his "little sister," recovered his mortification, and ere very long his familiar place, at least with his father. Amy, left a little to herself, recovered her calm, under shelter of the two independent streams of conversation on either side of her, and thus her introduction to her husband's family was over. Whatever they might think of her, there were no more first impressions to dread.

CHAPTER XV.

"WELL, old fellow!" said Joseph Crawford, "with your expectations and prospects and that sort of thing, I don't see why you should not be jolly enough. Your wife, though I confess she's not the sort of woman I should have expected *you* to marry, is a sweet little body. I think you're famously well off."

"My wife," said Amy's husband with an involuntary bitterness, "is no more like what she was when I married her than you are, Joe."

"Hum, she is a very pretty little woman," said good-humored

Joe ; "many a fellow would be very glad to change places with you, though I don't mean to interfere with any man's right to grumble at his own wife."

"For example, you grumble at yours sometimes, I presume?" said his brother.

"Well, I can't say I do," said Joe with a smile. "If we had a chick or two about us, as you have, Maria and I would get on famously. There's one comfort, however, in that respect, Charley ; your wife's young and injudicious, and will never know when to stop. We may envy you when you've two, old fellow, but will only laugh at you when you're groaning under a dozen. That's the bore of children ; you can't keep a happy medium ; there's either too many or there's not enough."

"Do you ever hear anything," said Crawford, withdrawing from this subject, which did not please him very much, "of my uncle Molyneux?"

"Hear of him? to be sure ; why, he's coming here shortly, I understand," said Joseph : "he has a great fancy for Gerty. If it weren't that he's an honorable old beggar, Charley, and never broke his word so far as I ever heard of, I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see you ousted, my boy, and Gertrude set up heiress in your stead—if *she'd* stand it. I don't believe he'd mind, but she's not one of your common sort of girls, isn't Gertrude ; you're safe enough in her hands."

"I am extremely obliged to you, Joe," said his brother with some haughtiness ; "but I happen to have been a favorite with my uncle before that chit of a girl was out of the nursery. She's a handsome girl enough, and may be a fine woman when she's seen a little of the world ; but what the deuce do you all mean, my father and the whole of you, by fooling her so completely, to the top of her bent?"

To the great astonishment of the younger brother, the good-natured Joe answered by a good deal of muttering and stammering and growing red in the face. The little sister, with her imperious young beauty and self-will and daring inconsiderate truthfulness and generosity, had gained no more secure dominion than over the heart of the childless elder brother, to whom she still was, and always would be, a child.

Nobody yielded so readily to Gerty's sway as the "old Joe," who was always ready to back out her most unreasonable caprices, who could be persuaded into seeing everything from his favorite's point of view, and who was more influenced by her daring leaps of opinion, though he laughed at them, than he himself had been prepared to allow. Joe was greatly taken by surprise when this inquiry was addressed to him. A momentary impulse of knocking anybody down who questioned Gerty's supremacy flushed him with anger first, and then, with a good-hearted shame for his own unbrotherly inclination; and between the two sentiments he felt it extremely difficult to stumble into suitable words.

"The truth is," said Joe at last, with much hesitation—"of course you don't know her. I don't *exactly* wonder at what you say; the truth is, Gerty is anything but a common girl. After Mary's marriage everything in the house would have gone to sixes and sevens, but for Gerty. There's poor Madge, to be sure an excellent creature—not a better woman in the world, I believe, than Madge is—but knows as much about managing a house like Rookley, as I do. When Mary married, Gerty was only sixteen, not half the height she is now, only a bit of a girl, as we all thought; but I tell you, to see how that little creature came forward and took the management of everything, looked after my father, sir, set Madge all square, got the whole concern under hand as completely as she has her pony,—by George, it was beautiful! As unreasonable as a young colt, to be sure," said Joseph, a smile breaking over his face, as he, who was neither her husband nor her father, nor in any way called upon to rule over and be responsible for his favorite, recalled with a mixture of exultation and amusement certain recent freaks of the young princess of the house. "But somehow, I know no one of her years who manages to be right so often as Gerty—gets at it by haphazard, I believe; leaps straight into a way of thinking and sticks to it; but if you knew the history of Rookley for the last three years as well as I do, you would cease to be surprised at Gerty's influence. She has been the soul of the place."

"That I should have supposed *you* to be," said the ques-

tioner, with a little curiosity, watching keenly but secretly his brother's face.

Joe scratched his head and shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"If it was in my way, which it isn't," he said; "a fellow can't do too much of that. My father's very kind and friendly, and all that sort of thing; but a man can't always stand his eldest son poking his nose into everything; suggests unpleasant ideas—heirs and administrators and assigns, and so forth. We are on the best terms possible, the old boy and I—confidential even; but still, you understand, it isn't in human nature to have your successor always poking about you, as if he wanted a chance to tip you out of your seat. I want nothing of the sort, Heaven knows! The longer the governor lives to enjoy it the better I'll be pleased, and he believes it too, I'm pretty sure. However, that's my principle, Charley; and so Gerty has been, as I tell you, for a couple of years and more, the soul of the place."

"To your perfect satisfaction, I perceive," said Crawford, with the slightest possible sneer. "And how does Madeline like it? Poor Madge is superseded as well as the rest of us."

"Poor Madge is only too happy to be so kindly and completely relieved," said Joseph, quickly. "Nobody understands Madge like Gerty. My father flutters and disturbs her, poor soul, with his politeness and satire. You take greatly after my father, Charley, and always did. I am always treading upon some tender point; even Maria, though she's the best creature in the world, makes mistakes sometimes; but Madge is always safe with Gerty, especially since her entanglement with this curate fellow, you know——"

"What curate fellow?" cried Crawford, in amazement.

"Haven't you heard of it? hasn't your wife told you yet? Women always ferret out these bits of gossip," said Joe. "Madge, as you might have observed if you had used your eyes, has gone crazy on severe Anglican principles, Charley. She is what I call a desperate Puseyite high-church woman, all along of a curate we had here a couple of years ago, I believe. He was a very nice fellow, had a little something of his own, and was of a very good family—nothing in the

world that any man in his senses could see to prevent them making a match of it. They went on with all the usual sort of philandering for some time—not exactly the usual sort, by-the-by, for this was made up of services of the church, and confessions, and absolutions, and that sort of thing, the fellow giving himself credit for being a priest, you understand, and poor Madge believing in him as if he had been St. Peter: the short and the long of it was, that the two fools found out somehow or other at last that they were in love, and very much astounded and distressed they were, Gerty says; but as his ‘principles’ were very strong against the idea of clergymen marrying, and as Madge’s principles were exactly what *his* were, they had a heartrending scene, and parted for conscience sake. It *is* absurd; but Gerty won’t stand any ridicule, I can tell you. They correspond now in the Heloise and Abelard style, I suppose; but for Gertrude, Madge would have been a sister of charity or nun, or whatever you like to call it. Gertrude persuaded her there were lots of good to be done at Rookley. She isn’t very wise, isn’t Madge, but it does one’s heart good to hear how they speak of her in the village; and if you’re not pleased to have such a couple of sisters, *I* am, and there’s a story for you. Didn’t expect we cultivated such things at Rookley, did you, Charley? eh?—romance of real life.”

“There’s always some such rubbish where there’s women,” said Crawford. “Common sense, I think, would have suggested that you or my father should interfere.”

“So we both thought, but they overruled us. I don’t believe it’s a case for interference either,” said Joe; “perfectly honorable and high-minded on both sides, for a couple of blockheads as they are. I’m content to wait—nothing like a little life for showing a man what a humbug *that* sort of thing is. As for Madge, she’ll stick to it, of course; but if he modifies *his* opinions, I dare say he’ll find a way to change hers. She’s a good soul, but never set up for being clever all her life; so that’s our poetical episode, you see. I’m rather tired with such an unusual spell of talking; let’s have *your* story, Charley; let’s make up the family chronicle while we’re at it. It’s odd if you haven’t a better romance than mine.”

"When one marries one makes an end of *that* diversion," said Crawford, with a smile; "if a man knocking about the world like me ever had a chance for it. I'd rather a long way hear about my uncle. How is he? where is he? How did he take my unfortunate marriage when he heard of it? At least he should be pleased, with *his* pride and self-consequence, to know of an heir."

Joe, good-natured as he was, winced slightly at this last remark.

"You're all right there, so far as I know," he said, with a little constraint. "You have been brought up to consider yourself his heir, and he won't go back of his word. No; for my own part I have perfect confidence in my uncle. To be sure, he's very fond of Gerty, and I dare say would rather leave what he has to her than to you; a mere matter of taste, my dear fellow. You see he *likes* her; but nothing less than the discovery of some dishonorable action, I am convinced, could make him cast off any man who has been accustomed to consider himself his heir."

"And that undiscovered dishonorable action, it is not the most pleasant hypothesis in the world; I presume," said Crawford, growing darkly red with a virulent offence and suppressed rage for which his amazed brother could find no reason, "that you don't mean to infer its existence with me?"

"Charley, my dear fellow! do you take me for a heathen?" cried the kind-hearted elder brother; "why, I stand up for you through thick and thin, old boy! I'd believe dishonor of myself quite as readily. Nonsense! stuff! don't be so quick to suppose offence. You've married a very sweet little wife, a much more sensible thing than ever was done by uncle Molyneux, and you've got a couple of pretty children. You're a very lucky fellow, not the slightest fear of you. You *might* suggest to Mrs. Charles, you know, to be a *little* more lively if the old boy comes while you are here: he likes to be amused, the old reprobate! that's one reason why he's fond of Gerty. I'd give her a quiet conjugal hint, sugar it up with some compliments you know—how charming she can be when she chooses, and that sort of thing. If I were you——"

"And make her more frightened and conscious than usual

to spite me," cried his brother. "Is that all you know of the perversity of women? It is you then who are the lucky fellow. No; what way *I* make, I must make alone."

The ladies came in sight at the moment, and the fraternal colloquy ended: Charles leaving it, stung, and sore, and angry by the poisoned puncture of that most unintentional and innocent arrow of his brother's, yet trying to deceive even himself in the matter, and to persuade his own mind that it was not the consciousness of a "dishonorable action," but the impracticability of his wife, which vexed and chafed him at his heart: Joseph, uncomprehending, vaguely pained and sorry for the brother whom he still retained a boy's affection for. But he had no genius for the inexplicable: it was more agreeable to go on with that pleasant bevy of young women, and show the hothouses to Charley's gentle little wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

THIS visit to Rookley was a new era in Amy's life; she had never before lived among so many women, and they were all kind to her in their various ways. Mrs. Joseph, or Mrs. Maria, as she was more commonly called, was buxom and good-humored like her husband, cleverer than the excellent Joe; a woman with all that easy consciousness of being able to do most things she wishes, which belongs to an heiress and rich wife: she dressed very well always, and never, except on rare occasions when the family happened to be in mourning, and she could not help herself, otherwise than brightly. Mrs. Maria was great in morning toilette; the ravishing caps, the pretty bows of ribbons, the dainty delicacies of embroidery in which she delighted, were enough to drive poorer women into fits of envy. She was only bearable in the evening, for the evening dress which revealed such a pair of arms and shoulders, had need to be substantial, and was not

remarkably becoming; but in all her comely bloom, and buxom matronly freshness, and in all the profusion and fulness, and pretty ornament of the wealthy dress she loved, it was impossible to see a more prepossessing, full-bloomed woman, pleasant and kind, and spreading comfort round her, save where she sowed a few seeds of that envy, which she certainly was not responsible for, and had no malicious intention of calling forth.

Mrs. Maria was five and thirty, no very great age, but one which placed her on a very sensible altitude above the three young women who were her present companions. She was old enough to have consented kindly to the one lack of her life, the want of children, and to have given up the thought. She liked life, and all its agreeable commotions. She took care of her husband's comfort, and of her own, with a cosy perfection of detail, only possible in a household where some dozen servants found their sole occupation in personal service and ministrations to the comfort of the two who reigned beneficent, but self-enjoying, at the head; for the fortunate Joe, who had married a wife as wealthy as she was agreeable, was very well able to afford an establishment of his own, and was only a visitor at Rookley, like his less lucky brother.

Mrs. Maria took very kindly to Amy; she patronized the young mother, as childless women so often do, with a little envy, and a little satire, and a great deal of good-humor, offering her advice with confessions of knowing nothing about it, which were only half sincere, and had the minutest particle of bitterness in them, and looking on while her sister-in-law hugged the babies, perfectly ready to laugh and clap her plump hands, and dangle the glittering ornaments at her watch-chain before the eyes of little Edward and his scarce-conscious infant brother, but by no means so well inclined to take the children on her silken lap, or venture her bow and ribbons within reach of their riotous clutches. Mrs. Maria did not appreciate the privilege of "taking" the baby, which Madge waited so lovingly for, and Gerty snatched with girlish fondness. She laughed, and said she could not trust herself; she found out when the infant's cap was awry, and, nicely though nurse had darned it, could tell where that tear

had been in Master Edward's best frock. She admired the children exceedingly, liked them, and praised them, but always with a kind of good-humored satire, and appearance of laughing *at*, as well as with, which sometimes put her timid sister-in-law a little out of countenance. But still she was very kind, very agreeable, a famous companion in a country house. Amy, save for this little unexpressed uneasiness, which even in her own mind she had never put into words, was quite satisfied with, and grateful for, the kind notice of Mrs. Maria.

Next came Madeline, or Magdalen as she preferred calling herself, or Madge, as she was named familiarly in the family. Poor Madge was as tall as Gertrude, though with all the difference of form by which a slight, slender, slim figure distinguishes itself from the splendor and fulness of more perfectly developed beauty. Madge was not angular, but she was indisputably thin, a characteristic fully revealed by the dress, gray or brown stuff, made, as Joseph said, on "the strictest Anglican principles"—principles then in their full flush of novelty—which she habitually wore. Her slight tall figure in those soft, plain, clinging garments, though it was totally unlike her sister's, had a pleasant, pensive, gliding grace of movement, full of an attraction of its own. Her hair was lighter than Gertrude's, of a soft darkness, and silky texture, her color faint, her eyes soft, much cast down, and as gentle as a dove's. She wore none of the pretty things which Gertrude had a careless, girlish liking for, and saving the spotless linen collar round her pretty throat, and snowy cuffs turned up from her hands, had nothing about her to break the unvaried color of her dress. A small gold chain of very delicate workmanship round her neck, with a tiny cross hanging to it, was Madeline's only ornament; *ornament*. . . she would have been shocked to call it, though the gentle creature had many a grievous compunction, to wit, of the human sentiment, which sometimes intruded into her devotion, as she kissed her little cross, for, explain it as she might, it was still a love gift, the only one she had ever received, her sole token of the innocent "entanglement," into which she and her young Oxford enthusiast had unwittingly led each other.

He was her spiritual guide, her father in the faith. Her gentle epistles to him breathed a purer visionary atmosphere of impossible existence, than belonged to any conventual rule, or inspired any Heloise, and his to her were as wonderful examples of youthful, high-flying, heroic, priestly presumption, as sincere and simple as a child's, and the *afflatus* of an enthusiasm most genuine in its unreality, as could be conceived. *He* would rather a great way that she had been a nun in some new Anglican form of that old institution; but was content, on the whole, that she should follow her vocation in Rookley, and endeavor to introduce a better light among that dulled people, which she did in her gray gown and gray cloak, and little close bonnet, none the worse, if little the better, for the uniform, with words that could not help but be gentle, even where they reproved, with the soft step, and the soft voice, and the natural gracious humbleness which came amiss nowhere. Madge was no manager, and could not govern Rookley; but she could set the cottage invalid's broth upon its white napkin, with a dainty touch in her lady-fingers, which somehow made its savory simplicity delicate, and did such little matters without a suspicion on either side that she was doing anything beneath her, or lowering by the merest hair's breadth her position—a thing which the courageous Gerty, in all her energy, and self-will, and pride, could not have done. Perhaps when the curate came to his senses, Madge, by some sweet chance, might turn to a dainty housewife too.

She had not a great deal to say, and she had a little gentle primness in her manner of saying it which strangers sometimes smiled at, a misdemeanor which Gertrude never forgave. She took the babies into her heart and arms with an eager, hesitating, half awkward fondness, and a flush of real secret rapture, which she could not have put into words.

The advent of these babies was a new revelation to Madeline. She had scarcely seen her married sister Mary's twins. She had not found out before that half of the woman in her own shy nature. Her prayers for little Edward—her dreams over him of Edward the Confessor and the other saints who have borne that name—her visions of helping to train him up

a loyal champion of the Church—her thoughts of all the blessings that might come to the child if *he* could possibly be persuaded to superintend its education—gave a new silent employment to her mind. She glided about Amy, falling with a gentle facility into the needs and customs of the nursery, learning what had to be done with an immediate apprehension which astonished Gertrude, telling her new sister saintly stories, and rules of the Church, which Amy lent a willing ear to, knowing but little, poor soul, of anything but the merest outward form of religion, and finding out by that sweet talk her want of it, and the refuge that was open there for her heart. Amy made *that* discovery as instantaneously as Madge made *her* discovery of the womanish mother-longing in her own maiden nature.

The two fell into an immediate communion and fellowship which amazed Gertrude excessively, and at first did not please her overmuch. What Gertrude was, we have seen already. She could not brood over the babies all the morning, or put her heart there perpetually. She swept out and in of the nursery a dozen times a day, with her full skirts waving after her, and her ribbons flying, to seize little Edward in her arms and toss him about to their mutual delight, and Amy's trembling terror. She was over all the house at the same moment, in three or four different places at once, with a bright ubiquity. She had a thousand things to do, and twice a thousand to look after. Gertrude kept nobody waiting unless she pleased, and never was late but with intention and *malice prepense*. At the first touch, she did not quite like the idea that her sister Madge, whom she defended and took care of like a champion, had found another associate, perhaps more congenial than herself, or that her new sister whom Gertrude had taken an immense liking for, whom "Charley" beyond doubt oppressed, and whom this young Quixote had vowed likewise to defend, should take more to Madge than Gerty. But she soon found out the perfect advantages of the arrangement, and was herself again. If Amy *could* have recovered the heart and life which had been robbed from her, it would have been in this house.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Your first child was a girl, was it not! I used to think I should like to have a little girl—delicious little toys they make sometimes when they come to an age to dress them nicely," said Maria, "a gratification one can't have with boys, at least without all sort of remonstrances and protestations: but your first was a girl?"

"Yes," said Amy, with the blanched look of despair which any such allusion always brought to her face.

"Maria!" cried Gertrude, secretly and not without virulence inflicting a hasty pinch upon her sister-in-law's stout arm, "why will you vex her with such questions? Dear Amy, don't mind!"

"My dear, I know it is a very long time ago, or I should not have mentioned it," said Mrs. Maria apologetically. "(You dreadful little fury! look at my arm!) I remember Joe telling me that Charley had written how very, very much you felt it: to be sure, it was natural with a first baby. Was it a delicate child?"

Amy turned away her dumb, white face, with an agony which even her more sympathetic companions wondered at. She shook her head by way of contradiction to the last question. She could not bear it. The anguish of hearing her lost infant mentioned was great enough without this attempt to lessen that unapproachable baby's perfections to the poor, fond, jealous, yearning mother, who was half crazed on that point. Delicate! with one of the strange vagaries of over-excited feeling, Amy could scarcely keep a sharp denial from her lips. She could not bear a disparagement of the perfect health and beauty of the deserted child, her firstborn, and the beginning of her strength. She was more querulous, more intolerant, than if the infant had actually passed into that perfection of death which sometimes moves the mind of the bereaved in the same way. But Aprile was alive—alive! and who could defend her baby loveliness but her mother?

Gentle Madge, who was somewhere about the room doing something, made a quiet diversion without saying much about it. She set little Edward up at the table in the old-fashioned high chair which had been used in the Rookley nursery ages ago, and spread open before him a book compiled by her own hands. It was not, however, a literary effort of poor Madge. It was a book of linen, with pictures of all descriptions pasted in it. Edward, by an extraordinary chance, had made a full stop before a pretty little colored sketch of a little Gothic church.

"Look, Amy!" said Madge, "look, Gertrude, what the dear child has found! The sketch we made for uncle Molyneux for the church he once promised to build. Ah, I dare say he will never do it *now*! but, dear boy, *you* shall when you come to be a man: to teach the poor people and the poor little children to say their prayers."

"I never thought church-building was in uncle Molyneux's way," said Mrs. Maria. "He is coming here, I believe, Gertrude. My dear, have you got a hint from your husband to make yourself particularly agreeable to uncle Molyneux?"

"I have scarcely heard anything of him but his name," said Amy, who was recovering herself but slowly, and had a headache and a beating at her heart, as feeble women unnecessarily agitated are wont to have.

"But you know, at least, that Charles's expectations are all from him, and how important it is he should like you, for your little boy's sake," said Mrs. Maria.

Amy turned round with a frightened face, and said, "Like *me*!" in such a tone aghast that her buxom sister-in-law laughed, and clapped her hands, and Gerty threw her impetuous arms round the timid little woman, and, half angrily, half fondly, kissed her before she was aware.

"Do you think it's so unlikely?" cried the impatient Gerty: "I like you; I should like to hear any man say he didn't, or woman either! Amy, you dear little goose, you will make me angry if you tremble. Why don't you know better? Why don't you believe in people loving you? Uncle Molyneux is a dreadful old heathen; he gets on very

well with Maria and Joe, and such people; he does all kinds of improper things, but he *has* a heart after all, when one knows where to find it. He laughs at Madge, but he gives us quantities of money for her schools and poor people. Then he has some sense; one is always safe with a man who has *sense*. To be sure he will like you!"

"My dear, it appears to me that Gerty only makes you more frightened," said Mrs. Maria, who never called Mrs. Charles anything but "my dear;" "and if your husband speaks to you he'll make matters worse. Though Joe and I are capital good friends and always were, I know what a husband's hint is to a young woman. Take my advice, and don't mind it. I am older than you, and know some things you don't know. Don't take any more notice of uncle Molyneux than of any other stranger. Don't believe Gerty or anybody else; he's a very proper old gentleman; he neither bites nor scratches," said Maria, unconsciously gliding into drolery and ridicule, which disturbed the effect on Amy's simple mind of her sensible and friendly advice. "It is not every one that is born like Madge, with an instinct for building churches. Don't believe a word that anybody says to you about him. He's only a cozy old bachelor who loves to take care of himself; and a very sensible thing to do."

Amy did not make any answer: she looked first towards her children, and then unconsciously, with a longing, half-envious glance, at Gertrude, who was playing with little Edward. If for the sake of her boys it was important that uncle Molyneux should like *her*—if, for *their* interests, their mother should have been able to take some place of her own in the surrounding world—why had not she something of the abounding vitality and force of that happy young creature who, after all, was but a little younger than herself? why? And then Amy's look grew compassionate and tender in its admiration, as it had been the first time she saw her husband's young sister. Alas! all that courage, all that daring, all that sweet, wilful, undaunted spirit, what was it but a blissful inexperience and dear ignorance of the dread and terrible thing which Amy, to conceal its cruelty from herself, had begun to call life?

While the conversation took this turn, Madge had been quietly trying on her bonnet and fastening round her great gray cloak. When this was done, she looked over her little basket to see if she had omitted anything; the basket was too small to carry the substantial portion of Madge's almsgiving. There was nothing it but what Mrs. Maria called "nonsense," except one little packet of special tea, which one old woman in the village sighed for when she had her "bad turns." Among the nonsense was a bundle of tracts, *church-tracts*, superlative tracts, odd productions containing a little piety and a great deal of Anglicanism, and proving that there must be some certain force in that vulgar, Low-Church, dissenting method of getting at the people. Then in a little roll, with a small bundle of pens belonging to it, was a child's copy-book with copy-lines written in Madge's own pretty, up-and-down, uncharactered hand, intended for a young wife who was "no scholar," and was deeply anxious to learn, without exposing her ignorance. Beside that again was a piece of canvas wrapping up a little Berlin-wool pattern and the materials for working the same. Sad frivolity, was it not? but very cheerful amusement for the poor girl with the spine complaint, who could do nothing but needlework, and got so sadly tired as she lay on her back all day long with those perpetual pinafores, that had always to be made and mended for the ten children of the house.

The little basket was full of such things, not charities, only friendlinesses, kindnesses, given and carefully sought out, as Madge supposed, in simple adoption of a sophistry which was quite beyond her own sweet limit of understanding, to extend her "influence for good," and give her opportunities of reproof, and counsel, and admonition; in reality flowing without any sophism out of a tender heart which even fanciful troubles could move into sympathy. When she had made sure that all was right, she glided away on her mission without any one observing her, no one at least but Gerty, who swept to the window to watch her sister's gray figure moving down the avenue, and then drawing both her companions with her, by the very breadth and current of her own movements, flashed out of the room, calling, with a voice that rang sweetly through

the passages, to "Maria! Amy!" to come immediately as long as there was time, and see.

When Mrs. Maria, with Amy in decorous companionship, had reached, at a very different pace, the foot of the stairs, they found the gentlemen assembled in the hall, waiting for them, Charles alone asking, with more displeasure than interest, what they were going to see? Nobody answered him, but Gerty ran across the lawn towards the ruin, with her bright uncovered head and sweeping dress, and a large key in her hand. When Mrs. Maria had made a little good-humored fuss about the necessity of putting a shawl over her pretty cap, because "she was not invulnerable like Gerty," and Amy, because somebody had told her, had tied on a garden hat which hung in the hall, the whole party followed. Gertrude stood at the great door which she had opened, under the heavy old Norman arch, from which the ivy had been just sufficiently cleared to show the zigzag ornament which antiquaries love.

It was a breezy winter day, and there had been recent rain; some great heavy translucent drops sprinkled upon her dark hair by the overhanging ivy, hung sparkling and trembling like so many diamonds over her brow as she met, or rather received, them at this antique threshold. Instinctively Gertrude's eyes turned with defiance in them upon her brother Charles; everybody else was pleased and prepared to be pleased; he alone looked suspicious, sulky, and disapproving, with a curious determination to be offended, however things might turn out. She made him a little curtsey as she swung back the heavy door.

"Enter, knight of the frowning countenance, and have your demon exorcised!" said Gerty.

They all went in to what had been a fragment of an old wall, and which, being a fragment, looked prenatually lofty as they stood beneath the pretty opening in the roof, which some later lord of the soil had crowned with a louvre. The old walls, carefully cleared of the dust of ages, had been adapted to the uses of a domestic chapel; the old windows, one of them in perfect preservation, the other "restored" with fidelity, were filled with modest colored glass, which

told no story, but only shut out the trees outside and enlivened the dimness it helped to make with bands of ruddy color; the upper end, the ancient dais, served to receive an altar-table, which bore some rather timid decorations, and on the edge of its broad step a reading-desk; the floor was smoothly tiled and laid with lines of brown matting; a mediæval chandelier of brass, rather an equivocal performance, was suspended from the roof; chairs and benches sufficient for the household, and a velvet-cushioned seat and hassock for the head of the same, showed that the creator of the household sanctuary had full confidence in its being used. After the first moment of inspection, when the hum of admiration and criticism was about to begin, Crawford turned to his father, with a face in which his own annoyance and mortification were but indifferently concealed.

"I congratulate you on being able to afford so costly a plaything, sir," he said; "and I suppose I need not ask whose idea is this."

"No, you are quite right, my dear boy; of course it was Gerty's fancy," said his father, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "I opposed it at first, but she generally manages to get what she wants, the little despot; and a famous thing they've made of it; capital idea for preserving all of the old place that time and the storms have left to us,—is it not? Ah, she has a genius, that girl! not that *she* cares much for this sort of thing either; to please me by preserving the family relics, in the first place, and to gratify Madge, who has never heard of the plan, and is to know nothing of it, till she is called to prayers in the chapel to-night."

"And so," said Charles Crawford, between his teeth, as he turned aside under pretence of examining an ornament, "so, for a girl's whim, the old fool will squander his last farthing! Unselfishness! while I starve in a cottage and am patronized at Christmas. By Jove, it is enough to drive a man mad!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN the rest of the party had finished their examination of the chapel and had gone in again, Crawford remained behind, not within the ruin, but on the natural terrace outside which lay before the drawing-room windows, and sloped in a verdant bank on the other side towards the stream. There was no one to be seen at any of the lower windows of the house. The air was mild, though the afternoon was closing, and the damp of evening and rain cast a mist upon the hills. The masses of blunt ivy which wrapped the trunks of the leafless trees in a fictitious green, looked dewy and verdant in the rainy atmosphere, and trembling tufts of mistletoe swayed their watery berries in the air in pale abundance, not crisp and Christmas-like, but humid and drooping. The grass was so green that a child could have told its drenched and spongy wetness; the sky was still covered with clouds; and the little antique church upon the hill was blotted out by the mist, half of moisture and half of evening, which blurred the scarce decipherable outline of earth and sky; but for all that, some hardy birds chirped their last daylight notes somewhere among the trees; the fresh smell of the earth, not without its fragrance, came upon the air; and everything was mild and moist and dewy, dropping whispers of early spring.

Upon this natural platform, nobody observing him, Charles Crawford walked and pondered.

Now and then the gleam and sound of a light struck for his cigar, and guarded in its first moment of kindling with all the care and precaution of a smoker, showed how much consumption of tobacco accompanied his thoughts, and if those energetic puffs were any symptoms of the pace of his cogitations, they must have been sufficiently rapid. They were not very agreeable either, to tell the truth. He had come to Rookley with something more than the mere intention of visiting his father, and renewing his home relations. Circumstances had severed him entirely from his bachelor life, his

marriage first of all, and following upon that the occurrence at Hesse, which, though nobody knew anything of it, he himself could not forget, and this not wholly in respect to the deserted child, but the repudiated "debts of honor," which, according to his code, were quite as disgraceful.

Three years in Willesham had changed the current of his thoughts. That compulsory retreat, with its intolerable *ennui*, a weariness which it sickened him to think of returning to, had substituted the objects of graver life for his young man's eagerness after excitement and distraction. The desire for action, the stir of ambition, began to make themselves felt within him. If he had belonged, even nominally, to any profession, he would have thrown himself into it now with all his forces, and very possibly have distinguished himself: but he had no profession; none had been supposed necessary to the acknowledged heir of the rich Mr. Molyneux; and even the projects for his entering Parliament and standing for the small adjacent borough, which used to be held out long ago to stimulate his youthful ambition, while he was still at Oxford and the favorite of the house, had long died and been forgotten. But all these things, forgotten by everybody else, had returned to *him* many a dismal day, when, half smothered by the intolerable limits and restraints around him, he sat in the toy library of the Willesham cottage; finding scarce room enough to breathe, and ruminating, with all the fierce self-torture of energy confined and unprofitable, upon what he could do, and might not—upon what he might have done, and had rejected.

It was this, as well as a mingling of other feelings, that suggested his first letter to his father when Edward was born; it was this that mortified him so deeply when that overture passed without immediate response; and when at last he came to Rookley, he came in the full persuasion of being able to offer an apparent sacrifice to the comfort and ease of his father, of undertaking the concerns which now must have become too heavy for the old man's hands, and of establishing himself and his family during Mr. Crawford's life in the old house. From that point setting out, a career more worthy of his powers seemed to open to the dreams of the man whom

compulsory solitude and want of occupation had made a visionary. *Then* nothing more likely than a successful candidatureship for the borough of Hocking; then all the excitement of public life, the din of politics, the course of ambition. He was not so able as he thought himself, but he was clever and not very scrupulous; when he had once achieved that necessary standing-point, anything, everything, was possible! Thus he did not dream, but *reasoned*, making everything out by the severest and plainest probabilities. Given but the first step, and everything was secure.

And to be foiled in the whole—baffled, cheated, put to his wit's-end—by a saucy girl who suspected and defied him! Since his arrival he had resisted angrily his own conviction that the time for such an arrangement was over, and that his father no longer required any assistance in his affairs which he had not fully secured already. But time had put the absolute fact beyond denial. When he went to offer the help which he had flattered himself would have been so readily accepted, he had found Gertrude in possession, mistress of everything, and perfectly indisposed to yield her place to any sudden caprice of the brother whom she did not know. His father had sent him smilingly away, with thanks and politenesses unbearable. No, Gerty was his clerk; Gerty had managed everything for the last two years; Gerty was a capital man of business and understood everything without troubling him for explanations. Gerty herself did not even take the trouble to look pleased at her brother's dismissal, she was scornfully confident of her own security, so certain of the place and power which she held like a young paladin, the conquest of her sword and of her bow; and if anything had been wanted to complete his conviction of a fact so unwelcome and undeniable, this little incident of the chapel filled up the sum of proof. To satisfy the whims of this child there was no folly too great, no expenditure too lavish. He ground his teeth at them in secret as he saw the whole group surrounding her with their smiles and their support, and that affectionate playful submission to the young ruler who treated them all as her natural subjects. Such a sight at any time needs honest eyes to interpret it truly; an

ungenial critic can always breathe over it a spiteful signification.

To Crawford his father was a doting old fool, in his second childhood, cajoled into ridiculous fondness for the pet of his old age; his brother an indolent blockhead, who looked on and permitted it all, simply because his own interests were secure, and he was amused and saved trouble by this novel despotism. As for Gertrude, he did not clearly conclude what to think of her share in it; his bitterness fell into an evil sneer at feminine love of power, and the tricks and flat-teries by which she had gained her present place. He was ashamed to hate her or to permit himself to allow that he was matched, much less worsted, by such a rival. So far as *she* was concerned, he would only express his mortification by the bitterest of sneers; to do more would have been to lessen himself.

However, such was the state of affairs. This position, which he had supposed so easily attainable to himself—which would have given him at once a home and position suitable to his birth—which would have opened everything to his ambition, and restored his standing with the world—this place was held by a woman, a girl, manifestly unsuitable for any such office, who had no standing to recover, nor ambition to serve, and who ought to be flirting and dancing and looking out for lovers like other girls. He said to himself, with a curl of his lip, that Gertrude most likely meditated a great match, and had some eccentric duke or earl in her eye, who was likely to be captivated by so unusual an exhibition of character. But that did not mend matters for himself: here he stood palpably baffled, disappointed, his entire calculation made into a jibe and mockery by the failure of its first step, and himself nobody and nothing, without occupation or recognized place—a country gentleman's second son at Rookley—Mr. Charles, the prodigal of the family, at home—"the gentleman at No. 1, Willesham Green, the first house round the corner."

Was this all and to be all? Supposing all went right with uncle Molyneux, as indeed it was quite probable and "like his luck" that all might not go right, he might have to wait

ten years or more, ere that hale old man relinquished his revenues and lands to his expectant heir. What was to become of him during these ten years? Return to Willesham, pay his bills, and eat his dinners, sit opposite to his wife, and wait for the dead man's seat which might be long enough of coming to him? or if not that, what else?—he, the gay Charley Crawford of five years ago, who could take down half-a-dozen merry companions to shoot at Rookley when he pleased, who knew everybody, and had a reputation, and on the score of his prospects was received in many a circle higher than his own. No wonder that it was with a bitter sneer at women, which he who had been ruined by women, in a sense something different from the common one, might well indulge in—he whom a dowdy melancholy wife had bereft of all comfort in existence, and an artful young Semiramis of a sister had ousted out of his natural rights—that he tossed the latter end of the last cigar in his case glowing and sputtering upon the wet lawn, and turned on his heel as he caught sight of the slender gray figure of his sister Madge coming up the long avenue with her little basket in her hand.

He had so far ameliorated his condition by this promenade out of doors that he was no longer fiercely and passionately disappointed, and forced into unwilling conviction of having deceived himself, but was simply in an intolerable bad humor, ready to quarrel with any one who should present himself, and, if no better game interposed, much inclined to discharge the vials of his wrath upon his wife. He was in no mind to meet Madge, with her nervous voice and smile, “so deeply conscious of having just done no end of good,” as he said most unjustly and cruelly. So, divided between a sullen self-suggestion, of leaving Rookley, where he never now could be anything but a visitor, immediately, and a counter thought of “taking all the good he could get” out of its superior comforts, and delaying as long as possible his return to that “beggary cottage,” he went indoors, and, as it was too early yet to prepare for dinner, and he had all the angry curiosity of opposition about all the proceedings of the family, who were, as he supposed, so selfishly regardless of himself and his interests, directed his steps to a room adjoining the library

where there was a billiard-table, and where Joe at least, and not unfrequently his wife, was generally to be found about this hour.

However, it must not be imagined that Mr. Charles Crawford was quite so miserable or so selfishly used by his family as he himself supposed. He had a very good younger son's allowance—an allowance made to the favorite, which after events much disposed his father to diminish, and the continuance of which was chiefly owing to Joe's wealthy marriage and good-humored intercession. He was the acknowledged heir of the rich Mr. Molyneux, who, spite of all his just displeasure, had never said anything about altering his will. He had been absent entirely by his own arrangement and at his own pleasure from Rookley for some four or five years before the time when he thought fit to signify his marriage to his father. In that time his younger sisters had grown women, his own coteremporaries were married; everything was changed. The house which he left to itself without the comfort of his invaluable presence had learned to do without him; the current of affairs had fallen into a new channel, and could flow without his help; yet with the strange delusion of which no amount of good sense can cure a man whose self-opinion is inordinate, he had comforted himself with the belief that everybody must have continued to miss him, and that his vacant place, the place of his youth, remained always open for him at home.

CHAPTER XIX.

CRAWFORD found, as he had expected, in the billiard-room, his brother and his brother's wife. Mrs. Maria was reading letters, Joe was busy with the second edition of a morning paper, which had just arrived by the afternoon post. Though he was not much of a politician, he had just enough interest in public events to be moved by a stormy debate and the prospect of a change of ministry, and was reading with a lit-

the excitement scraps from the papers to his wife, who, with a lady's crossed and crammed epistle in her hand, to which she returned when he stopped, did not appear too deeply engrossed in her own news to be unable to give willing attention to his. The door of communication between this room and the library was open, and Joe occasionally raised his voice, to make himself audible to his father, who was visible within.

A great debate on an important public question had been all but finished on the previous night; the position was more exciting than if it had come to the certainty of a vote. Speculations as to the probable number of the majority by which the government was expected to be beaten, to the course which the government would take if this expectation came to pass, to the probable members of the new ministry, and, still more exciting, to the chances of a dissolution of Parliament, filled the paper, and were discussed in all their various bearings by all the correspondents whom every great event, with that wonderful spontaneity of feeling which everybody must marvel at, calls up from every quarter of the country to the astonishing columns of the *Times*. When Joe read in his most elevated voice, without being in the least interrupted in his occupation by the entrance of his brother, some few words touching this dissolution from the head of the government himself, the old gentleman rose from his distant seat, and came to the library door; there he stood in the opening, with his white head and erect old figure, touched, but not shaken, by age, with a little stir of excitement on the courteous blank of his face. The much privileged Charley, who "took after" his father, and had once been that father's chiefest favorite, sat gazing intently upon the old man, leaning forward from his seat, supporting his head on both his hands, listening, but doing more than listen. Mr. Crawford did not even show the slightest consciousness of his presence. The father of the house was looking at his eldest son, with something to say strong in his face, and waiting with a little impatience till the speech was ended, that he might say it. Mrs. Maria, too, dangling her letter from her hand, with something in *her* mind also, as was evident from the momentary glance of intel-

ligence which passed between her and her father-in-law, looked with a like expression at her husband.

This was how the group appeared to the younger brother, who took no share in it, but looked on. If he had been a tutor or a steward, uneasily thrust into a family party, he could not have felt more detached and separate. At length he perceived his brother's voice grow irregular and full of annoyance. Joe had become sensible of the double fire of looks to which he was exposed. He went on for a little, with a disjointed and pre-occupied manner, then suddenly sprang up, and dropped the paper on the carpet.

"I know what you're going to say," cried Joe, with a little vehemence; "what *is* the use of worrying a harmless fellow out of his life? I don't want to vex or disappoint you, father, you know I don't, but what kind of a figure should I make, does anybody suppose? Give one vote for a thousand gapes, and get all the little wit I have stupefied out of me? I tell you, father, it won't do; I tell you, Maria, it's abominable nonsense! and by George, I won't do it!"

With this energetic protestation, he threw himself into his chair again, bit his thumb-nail with an unconscious adoption of that homely old method of defiance, and faced round at his two adversaries in mute resistance. With the instinct of rivalry, and jealous indignant self-love, his brother divined in a moment what the matter was.

"You do yourself much wrong, and me also," said old Mr. Crawford. "A man does not need to be a showy popular speaker to make himself respected in the House, and a useful servant of his country; very much the reverse, I assure you. Some of the most influential of private members never open their mouths, except in committees, although, even for that matter, Joe, you have a very practical common-sense way of setting forth a subject when you choose, which Englishmen always appreciate. Everybody acknowledges that this Edwards is a very unfit man to represent Hocking. What is he? a London common-law barrister, with no object in existence save a solicitor-generalship, when his party comes into power; a man unconnected with the district, who represents only *himself* and the money, and lies, and cajolery, which got him

into his seat. Look at *your* position, my dear boy; head in a few years of the Crawfords of Rookley, as old a family as there is in this part of the county; representing also the family and influence of your excellent wife; a man with the greatest of status in the county and country, and surely much better qualified to judge of their best interests than a special pleader—a fellow who hires his intellect to the highest bidder. In case of a dissolution I entreat, I almost command, your reconsideration of the matter. It is your duty to the district where you have so many interests at stake.”

As the old gentleman delivered this animated address, standing in the open doorway, with the dim light from the library windows behind him, and his son's stout figure immediately in front, set with all the force of English obstinacy and immoveable passive resistance in an arm-chair, the scene was eminently dramatic and exciting. Behind Joe, leaning forward from the cushioned bench against the wall, sat that one spectator who had taken no part either by look or word in the discussion; he, to whose own youthful ambition this same prospect had been many a time held forth; he, whose career had been prophesied, not, like Joe's, as a voiceless representative of certain interests, but with all the brilliant colors of imagination, a parliamentary orator and leader; he whose whole frame tingled to hear the prospect, which would have been life to him *now*, warmly urged upon another while he sat by, as unregarded as any piece of furniture! There are moments in which men who love self alone, and follow no other principle of action, are deeply repaid for that desperate folly. It would be impossible to describe the inexpressible pang of mortification and injured self-regard which ran at that instant through Charles Crawford's veins. He waited with a mixture of eagerness, and bitterness, and sore contempt, for his brother's answer—contempt, disdain for the whole party in their blindness and want of knowledge, who could offer, he himself sitting by silent and unnoticed, a prize like this, of all men in the world to Joe!

Though the younger brother's face was more than half-concealed by his hands, though he had not made his presence perceptible by a single movement since this discussion began,

though even his deep breathing was partially restrained, some affectionate suggestion of nature brought a faint notion of Charley's thoughts to Joe's kindly and good-humored mind. *He* did not relax the least from his stubborn attitude by reason of his father's appeal; *he* squared his knees and shoulders more than ever when Mrs. Maria dropped her contribution of remonstrance and entreaty, and ludicrous representation of his reasons for refusing, into the general stream. He kept his arm-chair like a John Bull, as he was; wisely reticent of his motives, and distinct only in his "*won't*;" an allegorical figure, though he did not know it—an entire England in his own person; resolute, not to be forced a single step farther than he *would* go, and *did* see.

"What an enormous pity," cried Joe, with filial admiration, "that a splendid plucky old fellow like yourself, governor—begging your pardon for the vulgar expression—should ever grow old! As for the Hocking membership, I can't do it—everybody knows I can't do it—I may be lazy and self-indulgent, careless of my duty to the country, and all that sort of thing—I can't help it; I'm very comfortable as I am—exceedingly well off—the luckiest fellow I know; I couldn't better myself, however hard I worked for it; to tell the truth, I don't see how I *could* be better off, one way or another: and certainly not by making a slave of myself, and living through a London summer in the House. Bad enough when Maria drags me after her to all the *fêtes* and flower-shows, and half the parties she can hear of. No, no, father, *that's* impracticable; but I'll tell you what, sir, here's my brother Charley, a vast deal better qualified than me, and up to the sort of thing——"

Here Joseph paused abruptly, partly because the voice of Charles broke in with an imperative and mortified pride, begging that he might not be thought of in the matter, and partly because he felt he had no right to pledge his brother and did not exactly know what further to say.

Then there followed a blank silence—a silence more irritating, more intolerable to Charles Crawford than any kind of words. It showed so well to his jealous and susceptible imagination how entirely without thought of him his father had

been—how completely he had fallen out of that confidence and pride in which once the whole household held him! Even Maria did not venture upon one of her compliments which cost so little, as to Charley's "well-known abilities." Joe's incautious mention of him was met by a dead silence. If the previous talk had been mortifying, this was unbearable. He rose up hastily, crushing his hands together in an involuntary motion of anger and pain.

"You forget, Joe," he said, with a smile of passion, "that it is ages since *I* was supposed a fit representative of the house. It was only when I was a boy and liable to delusions, that Parliament and ambition and such high-flown fancies were suggested to *me*."

He was about to turn away when his father quietly and gravely bade him stop. Should he stop? A single rapid thought, more like a spiritual suggestion than any cogitation of his own, brought his own position swiftly and silently before him. A burst of mortified pride was an unprofitable indulgence; whereas, if any chance remained of regaining his position and hopes, it was right to avail himself of it. Accordingly he drew back and sat down, but could not do that without a certain look of injured superiority which he himself, could he have seen it, would have smiled at, grimly enough.

"Your brother Charles," said the old man, still addressing Joe, "is, unfortunately, little known in his own county; his prospects and interests are elsewhere. The chances are that, when a few more changes have taken place, he will not even retain his family name, but will have another; bringing with it duties and responsibilities which I trust," and Mr. Crawford made a slight inclination of his white head towards his youngest son, "he will not show himself indifferent to. Besides, to speak more plainly, my son Charles has not convinced me that he is to be depended upon in such important circumstances," continued the old gentleman, turning directly towards him. "It is true when you were but a boy—ages since, as you say—I had different thoughts and hopes. I thought you might ripen into such a man as I should have been proud of—such a man as would have supported the family credit, and added to their honors. And what have you done, Charley?" said

his father, melting and shaking his hand with the mingled grief and displeasure of a father and an old man. "What have you done? wasted years that can never be recovered, put a veil of doubt between yourself and those who are most concerned for you, left a large tract of your life in shade which perhaps it is safest for your friends not to endeavor to penetrate, made a doubtful marriage which does not render you happy, and behold the whole! Is that, think you, the history of a man who could ask the suffrage of his own father to make him a lawgiver and ruler of the State?"

When Mr. Crawford's voice began to melt and his face to soften, Mrs. Maria, a most discreet and wise woman, whose principle it was never to involve herself in any quarrels or disturbances of "the family," made a little deprecating gesture of apology to her brother-in-law, and left the room. The three gentlemen were alone. Pride and the sharp resentment with which a self-admiring man hears himself rebuked, struggled in Crawford's breast, alike with policy and natural feeling. As much heart as he had yielded to his father, and the middle-age discretion and calculation which grew upon him, told him loudly that submission was his only hope of success. He went up to his father, really touched so far as to make his penitential expression perfectly natural, and with an agitation about him, which, if it was partly attributable to anxiety and dawning hopes, the old man was very ready to accept for sorrow and genuine repentance.

"Well, Charley, well," said the father, holding his hand, and speaking slowly to keep down the something in his throat, "you've lost a great deal, my poor boy, and much that can't be recovered. Yes, yes, I believe you—you're a man of sense, now that you are a man, and know what waste and perversion it all is. You think me indifferent and careless, but you have disappointed me, Charley. There is Joe now, an excellent fellow"—Joe had followed his wife's example and left the room—"a respectable fellow—a boy that never gave me any anxiety; but he has no ambition and few abilities, and few people would recognize him for *my* son," said the old gentleman, dropping Charles's hand and falling into his usual tone, but erecting his white head with an unconscious

personal importance and self-esteem which proved emphatically the likeness which his younger son bore him. "Joe is utterly impracticable, as any one may see."

"For myself, my own ambition, honor, the life I have to recover, everything I can wish or hope for, sir," said Charles, with emphasis, "point me to public life. I have no profession; but there I *could* distinguish myself; even my unfortunate marriage could not harm me *there*."

"Don't speak of it, Charley," said Mr. Crawford, hastily; "don't aggravate my vexations. I might venture a contest if Joe could be moved to it; his wife is rich and he is very popular; but with you, my dear boy, it is impossible—utterly impossible! your abilities are unknown, even your person is forgotten; you have made no connexions to strengthen yourself. No; near as Hocking is, you know how divided is the influence; I could secure it for Joe, but I could do nothing for you. No, my boy, no; it is more than even *my* position in the county could justify. If anything is to be done for you in that way, it must be through your uncle Molyneux."

Silent, consuming the renewed mortification of his unavailing penitence, Crawford remained for some time by his father's table, covering his confusion by pretending to look at the papers which Joe had dropped. He had humbled himself in vain; he had made his acknowledgment of sin and bowed his arrogant head at a cost of pride and suffering which none of them could imagine; and his father received it as if all its object had been gained by the weak effusion of kindness with which *he* took his son's hand. The whole scene, increased in its humiliation by the fact that Joe had witnessed it, and even Maria beheld the beginning, had ended with an old man's pardon and reconciliation like a virtuous scene in a comedy, and that was all. While he sat subduing himself and his passion, he heard, and could even see indirectly while he still kept his eyes on the paper, that his father was searching for a letter; when Mr. Crawford had found this, he folded it down at a special point, said kindly, "This will interest you, Charley," and handed it to his son.

It was from his uncle Molyneux.

CHAPTER XX.

"THE red room, everybody knows that uncle Molyneux always has the red room," said Gertrude; "tell Mrs. Apsley I will come myself and see if anything is wanted, and I want to see Campbell about the fruit. What a horrid old bore an old epicure and gourmand is!" said the young lady, leaning over her desk with the cook's *carte*, which she was correcting with a pencil, in her hand, for Mr. Crawford himself loved good dinners; "here I have to send to town, and to Hocking, and to the gamekeeper, and, morally, to box Campbell's ears for impossible vegetables and fruit—only morally, Amy, don't look frightened—and all because my uncle Molyneux is coming to-morrow."

"To-morrow! is he coming to-morrow?" said Amy, growing, if possible, more pale than before.

"Yes; there is nothing to be timid about: he puts one to one's wit's ends when one is housekeeper, but he is very harmless otherwise," said Gertrude, coolly.

Gerty had forgotten all about Amy's alarm, and the recommendation which had been given her to make herself as agreeable and entertaining as possible to uncle Molyneux.

"Oh, by the by, Amy—I have never seen you since—was not Madge pretty last night when we all went into the chapel, and she started and blushed and clasped her pretty hands? did you notice her? Madge has very pretty hands," continued Gerty, closely examining her own, which were anything but ugly ones. "When prayers were over and we were coming out, in the dark, you know, she came and kissed me. She had never heard a word of it all the time. Don't you think I was clever to manage it so quietly? The windows were not put in till the last thing, and even then I made them leave the alders on the sill to make believe they were still growing.—What is it now, John? Pray tell Mrs. Apsley not to give herself any unnecessary trouble; I have sent orders to the fishmonger.—Mrs. Apsley is one of those people,"

said Gertrude, rapidly flapping up the leaves of her blotting-book to find certain memoranda she had placed there, and counting them over with a smile of conscious power and disdain, "who now and then forget themselves, and do not believe in *me*."

"You are so young," said Amy.

"I am not so dreadfully young," cried the *governante* of Rookley, turning with her rapid sweep of drapery and majesty of step towards her sister-in-law and suddenly meeting Amy's wistful look—that look which, with all its admiration and confidence, always combined a certain compassion. "I wonder very much," said Gertrude, "very, very much, you little sad white woman, why you look so pitifully at me?"

Amy, who dropped her eyes immediately and betook herself to her sewing, was very slow to answer.

"Because I wonder at you," she said, at last, timidly and with great hesitation; "because I often think and puzzle myself what you would have done in—in some things that I have had to do," she said, with a slight shudder; "because I wonder if you will always be as strong and as brave and rule over everything, or whether life when it comes will rule over even *you*."

This was a very long speech for Amy, and she shrank back a little after delivering it. Gertrude, standing there with bright eyes gleaming on her companion in all the splendor of her magnificent form and her self-willed imperative spirit, laughed that laugh of scornful sweet ineffable ignorance which is the paradise of youth.

"Life when it comes!" she cried, clapping her hands. "I who have all Rookley to manage, to recollect everything, and to think of everything, and to know that if anything happens to any one of twenty people, the blame is only with me—I that must manage so that all the estate and the tenants and the neighbors give papa only so much employment as will please him, and look after the rest myself—I that have to take care of Madge and keep Joe in order and see that everything is always right—when do you suppose life will come to *me*?"

As Gertrude stood looking down upon Amy with this question in a chorus of sweet disdain and laughter on her lips,

Crawford entered the room behind. He could not but pause to gaze upon the two : his sister so full of bright life, daring, and beauty ; his wife so chilled and quiet, with her youth blanched out of her, her tame monotonous needle-work, and her downcast eyes. He had not heard Gertrude's concluding question, but he heard her laugh of happy ridicule at the supposed inability of her companion to answer, and lost nothing of what she next said.

"Since you cannot answer me that," said Gertrude—"you who look at me as if you were my grandmother, and are, I suppose, only about two or three years more aged than I am—since you cannot answer me *that*, Amy, tell me what things you have had to do, that make you wonder how I should have done them. I will tell you in a moment ; I like to think what I should do in things that never happen to me. Remember Mrs. Apsley, Amy, and that dreadful red room that waits for me, and tell me quick while there is time."

"It was nothing, Gertrude," said Amy, with another slight shiver, and sigh. Then happening to look up, she caught sight of her husband, and started and changed color so visibly, that Gertrude swept round with all her usual rapidity, to see who or what it was. Her movement was so rapid, that she surprised her brother with a certain air of menace in his face. When he discovered her look, he came forward, and took up the conversation where Amy's unsatisfactory reply had left it.

"It would be worth one's while indeed, to speculate what two creatures so unlike as you and Amy, Gertrude, would do under similar circumstances," he said, with a smile : "you who are bold enough to face a lion, and she who is ready to shrink at the smallest monstrous mouse that creeps the floor. We had better take it up in committee of the whole house, some night when we want something to laugh at."

"Something to laugh at ! do you know," said Gerty, fixing her eyes full upon his with a look which it was very difficult to evade, "that Amy never laughs?"

"Doesn't she?" it was some little time before he answered, and then he found it hard enough to repress a rising color, half of anger, half of confusion. "She is of a melancholic temperament, which you never were."

"When I was snubbed and put down, and some people wanted to know why I wasn't kept in the nursery, I used to be sad enough sometimes," said Gertrude, with a girl's malice and injudicious championship: "at least I used to cry, perhaps it's different. If I had been a boy, I should have boxed you, Charley; shouldn't I have liked it? however, now I must be off to my bedroom, to see that all the pictures are straight, and everything in its proper place. When I know there is nothing to worry him, I am free to laugh as much as I like at uncle Molyneux."

So saying, Gertrude left the husband and wife to their *tête-à-tête*. If ever Gerty was tempted to anything dishonorable, it was to linger by that door, and listen, just for ten minutes, how Charley, when they were alone, spoke to his wife. She resisted the temptation, but went away with a heightened color and the air of a person who has discovered a mystery, and is full of interest and determination to find it out.

"He has done something to her, some time; I am certain of it!" said Gertrude to herself, with an unconscious exclamation aloud.

Vague as this was, she thought it a discovery. She had no dislike to Charley, but a settled and certain opposition; the warmth of her sisterly affection went all to the account of Joe and her sisters. Charley had left no pleasant impression upon the memory of the big little girl—the too big girl, who had already begun to take herself out of schoolroom and nursery, and whose premature elevation nobody but Charley opposed.

The husband and wife, thus left to themselves, remained in silence long enough to have baffled Gertrude, if she had waited for that ten minutes. Amy kept pertinaciously to the work, which always irritated her husband, and which she pursued monotonously with downcast eyes, thus prevented from perceiving his looks and their changes. He stood in front of her, moving about a little, lifting and replacing the things on the table, as a man does who is not quite sure how to begin what he has to say. There was a little pause; to his eyes that piece of white linen, the straight unvaried line she was training over it, the homely dull material, the motionless quiet in which she sat, was an emblem of her life. To him

there was nothing seemly in the sight of the domestic woman making her children's garments with her own hands. She was only the common drudge, the dowdy housewife, the born companion of a lower and meaner life. How had she come into *his* home and bosom, that inarticulate creature, of whom he began to feel an impatience beyond bearing? Heavens! to think that the delusion of a moment had put this permanent clog upon his life! But Amy sewing, with a little tremble at her heart, for the words which were coming, and a little weak womanish persistence, unconscious, for she had no wish to anger him at her work, had little conception of the thoughts that were in her husband's mind before he spoke.

CHAPTER XXI.

"You wanted to know what Gertrude would have done under your circumstances; I think I could have told you, though I am not aware how far you intended to take my sister into your confidence," said Crawford, who, little friendship as there was between himself and Gertrude, still took a little elevation of tone, from the fact that the object of his wife's admiration *was* his sister. "You have heard of the arrival that we are all expecting; do me the favor to think, if you can make such an exertion, how Gertrude, supposing the welfare of her husband and children to depend upon him, would receive my uncle Molyneux?"

"Yes, Charles," said Amy, in her tremulous voice; she did not lift her eyes from the sewing, which trembled a little in her hesitating hands, and the comparison fell heavily upon her mind. What would Gertrude do? Gertrude foresaw all the old gourmand's wants, and remembered his likings with her imperious attention. Gertrude made sure that there was nothing to worry him, that she might be able to laugh at uncle Molyneux. Amy might have done the one thing without anybody knowing of it, but she could never have done

the other. She made no further answer to her husband's question. She did not say to him, though the suggestion rose in her own mind, that Gertrude was born to all the familiarity of kindred with this unknown old gentleman, that *she* was no intruder into the family, and that even that bondage of special expectations might have curbed Gertrude as well as herself. She said nothing, but only thought it all over with stumbling haste and confusion in her own mind, tremblingly pursued her work, and did not raise her eyes.

When Crawford had answered his brother, that to tell Amy to make herself agreeable to uncle Molyneux, would only be to make her more conscious and frightened, his words had been wiser than his intentions. To take the wisest course, simply because it is the wisest, is an extent of virtue which few people are equal to. It was simply impossible for him to depart so far from his usual treatment of his wife. He had not temper enough for general purposes to deprive himself of the one legitimate safety-valve, and forego that chance, the last he might have for weeks, of frightening Amy out of the little wits she had left her; for he too must be amiable and benignant, for the edification of uncle Molyneux.

"You do not answer," he said; "and I certainly should not have thought of such a comparison, had not you suggested it: I beg you will understand me, Amy. Since I was a child, I have been understood to have a certainty of inheriting my uncle Molyneux's property. He is rich enough to make this very desirable, and what is for my interest, is also for the interest of your children. I assure you the matter is sufficiently important, both to them and myself, to warrant all the consideration you can give it."

"Charles! I will do anything in the world you tell me!" cried Amy, putting aside her work for the instant, and eager, with all her little ability, to respond to an appeal which seemed too serious for anger.

"Anything *I* tell you! that is your last device, is it?" cried her husband, with an incomprehensible rage; "this is your clever invention to get over all responsibility, and lay your sins upon *me*. Ah, I see it! you have done nothing but what I have told you? All your folly and criminal weakness,

which you revenge upon me every day, are to be laid to *my* score, are they? *My* influence has been so great over you, that you have given up every other duty, and you think that you, a human creature, a persistent pertinacious woman, a mother supposed to know her duties better than I do—you think you can get off the responsibility of your actions, by doing everything in the world I tell you! You think you can relieve yourself of your own duty, and put everything upon me!”

“Oh, Charles, I have never thought so, God knows!” cried poor Amy, though with the words came that additional pang, common to the weak-minded, of finding their deepest martyrdoms of submission and sacrifice angrily blamed and rejected by those for whom they have been made.

“Yes, I am aware that these are your feminine tactics,” he said, bitterly. “A man is maddened out of his wits, and forced to something desperate, and his wife, who ought to have some nature in her, and who has nothing on *her* mind to drive her frantic, yields and submits forsooth, as if she had no judgment of her own, betrays him into worse harm than he ever dreamed of, and then is a pathetic victim, and does anything he tells her! By Heaven, this will not do for me!”

These words fell into Amy's heart like so many stones. She had never acquitted herself, but perhaps when he began to speak, she *had* felt that he was the last person in the world who ought to blame her, and that even an allusion to the great misery of her life came ill from his lips. Now she looked up, with eyes wide open and trembling lips, to hear that she herself was the principal culprit; that, but for her weak acquiescence, that greatest of calamities might never have happened; that it was *she* who was to blame! She could make no reply to an accusation so dismal and unlooked for. She did not dispute it even in her own mind, but it went to her heart.

“My uncle Molyneux arrives to-morrow,” continued Crawford. “He is a man who cannot bear dismal faces about him. I am told that my long absence has disposed him towards my sister Gertrude, who can amuse and interest such a man. If *you* disgust and repel him with your repining face, the conse-

quences may be sufficiently serious. A man of my condition who marries a person like yourself has a right to expect that she should make some exertion to satisfy his friends. This is the first I have required from you. I do not choose to enter into explanations with my uncle Molyneux and make it clear to *him* how and why you lost your good looks and your cheerfulness," he continued, with a sneer; "I cannot even assure him more than once or twice that you *were* pretty when I married you; because people who have never seen you before might doubt even *that* fact; but I have certainly a right to insist that you should look as well and behave as becomingly as may happen to be within your power."

With this characteristic and likely advice Crawford left his wife; adjuring her to look well and cheerful, and to convey to his uncle Molyneux a satisfactory idea of a pretty and happy young woman, he went away, perfectly well aware that he had made her miserable, and knowing with a certain mixture of satisfaction and annoyance that she had never looked so wibegone and hopeless in her life. If this was not the best way of preparing her to receive uncle Molyneux with a bright countenance, what was? The idea, at least, was perfectly conjugal and true to nature.

He went away certainly with no great comfort in his own mind—went, repeating to himself what he had said to Joe—"What way *I* make, I must make by myself;" and when he came to think of that, smiling a little contemptuously at the idea of any great importance attaching to the looks of his wife. Though he had reason to distrust his own powers a little after recent failures, he could not but find consolation in thinking what he could do with uncle Molyneux. To this he set himself with all his powers. Upon this now everything depended, not the future and the prospects which he had little doubt of, but the present, and the life which otherwise seemed to be gliding through his fingers and eluding his grasp. With no compunction, and scarcely any remembrance of the chastisement he had just administered to the unoffending Amy, he set himself to consider how he should best attain his end, and recover his influence with his uncle. That it was possible, practicable, likely, he could not doubt; and all that

Mr. Crawford of Rookley might have done and would not, uncle Molyneux could do.

CHAPTER XXII.

LEFT to herself, Amy sat motionless and speechless long after her husband had forgotten the whole tenor of their talk, letting the work which had irritated him fall out of her woeful hands, and lost in a maze of thoughts which were not thoughts, which were impressions, recollections, and sensations full of pricks and dagger-points which wounded her whenever she turned. She made no resistance to the dreadful accusation thus suddenly brought against her. So much of her original youthful habit of trusting everybody else's wisdom before her own, survived her change, that she received this new aggravation with a passive consent to its cruelty which gave it full force. Hers was the fault, as hers the misery. Henceforward she could not even think of that lost infant without the dreadful consciousness that but for her own weakness—that weakness which was guilt—Aprile now would have been the delight of their home, able to respond to her mother's affection, and comfort her mother's heart. God help her! Was it all *her* doing—all! She offered no defence against this overwhelming thought; she suffered it to crush her to the very dust. She said to herself, that she, and not *her* husband, was the baby's close and inseparable guardian—that *he* could have done without her, while the infant could not,—that even if in the first startled moment she had gone away with him, she ought to have returned as soon as she knew what his intentions were—returned, whatever he might do or say—gone back by herself, penniless, deserted in her forlorn youth. Would he have permitted her? It did not matter, it was true: that was how the mother of Aprile, despite him and all the world, ought to have done,—that was what, however hindered, little Edward's mother would do now.

She was sitting thus, not crying—far beyond that stage of suffering—when Madge came into the room. Gentle Madge did not hasten up to her with urgent, indignant inquiries as to what had happened, as Gertrude might have done, but softly soothed and subdued her silent trouble without any questions, content only to know that something was wrong. If Amy had been less timid, her secret would have escaped from her into Madge's gentle keeping, before she was aware. As it was, she had courage to confess after a while, that her husband had been speaking to her of uncle Molyneux—that she knew she was so dull, so tiresome, so unentertaining!—that she found herself as little able to change,—that she got so much frightened when she thought what was expected of her, and knew how helpless she was—that indeed, indeed she did not know what to do!

“Dear Amy,” said Madge, caressing her gently with a sympathy which eased her heart; “I think I can tell you what to do—oh! such a comfort and help!—Go into the chapel, dear—I will get the keys for you—and pray.”

There was something in the suggestion which at once frightened and comforted the sufferer. To go down into the chapel was something different from going simply into her own room. It required a less stretch of spiritual realization to suppose God's presence *there* in the place sacred to Him, than to think of it as existing everywhere, and only wanting the cry of appeal, the voice of entreaty. Her face changed out of its blank into a little color, a touch of longing, a stir of hope and fear. Madge said nothing more; but glad to her sweet heart of having drawn this other soul to what she supposed the certain comfort of real devotion—devotion sanctioned by the Church in all ages, prayer in its due place—she put her own gray cloak softly round her sister-in-law's shoulders, drew the hood over Amy's head, and led her downstairs.

Amy's little figure was lost in that great mantle; she went with a trembling thrill of expectation; she stole out timidly alone, and with her heart at her mouth turned the key in the great door. When she was within, alone, and out of reach of everybody, Amy's heart failed her. She sank upon the nearest bench, almost fainting with superstitious dread and

terror. God was here—this silence and solitude were instinct with God—a God to be approached with ceremonies which Amy did not know. Her old childish teachings did her no good in this holy place. “Enter into thy closet and shut thy door,” might have suggested something to her poor enfeebled mind of what she had learned in her youth; but here she was paralysed and helpless, feeling a terrible guilt and presumption that crushed her to the ground. Who was *she*, to come here alone, to front the Majesty of Heaven?—she, who for a man’s displeasure had deserted the dearest duty that ever was laid upon woman,—she, who for fear of a creature, had forgotten the Creator’s primitive laws, and forsaken the charge He put into her hands; and yet *she* had ventured to come alone and undefended to this awful, solemn tryst—to His very seat and dwelling!

Stupified, terror-stricken, crushed by that deep consciousness of guilt unredeemable, which her husband’s vindictive lips had thrown upon her, Amy made the only protestation possible to her feebleness and ignorance, and over-excited mind: she sank upon the chapel floor in a dead faint, tried beyond her strength, appealing by nothing but her utter helplessness, the extremity of her need and of her suffering, to the unknown God whom she had gone to seek. An hour after Madge found her in this melancholy condition. She had fortunately left the door open; and, doubtful of her long absence, her sister-in-law went to seek her. Madge was greatly frightened and much distressed, divided between fear of cold and damp and the chill of the unused place, and hope that the swoon was ecstatic, and that perhaps some revelation, as of old, had been vouchsafed to Amy. She managed, however, to bring the unfortunate young woman to herself without calling other assistance. Amy opened her eyes with a shudder, and had nothing to say but that it must have been mere foolishness and fright, and—and cold perhaps. This was the anxious suggestion of Madge; but she had not been comforted, the poor soul! She came away leaning on Madge’s arm, with a head which ached as much as her heart did, and in a state of absolute bodily prostration. Madge, more alarmed than she would say, blaming herself deeply, and troubled by an

extent of suffering greater than she knew how to fathom, led Amy to her room, made her lie down, had the windows darkened, and took her own place by the bedside.

Madge herself was sufficiently involved, by the sad failure of her experiment, to feel it desirable to say no more about it than was needful. She resisted the feeble attempt of her patient to get up at the sound of the dinner-bell—she scarcely comprehended the flush of nervous color that came upon Amy's cheeks when her husband's step was heard approaching. Madge went immediately to the door of her brother's dressing-room to explain how it was. Amy was ill; had fainted; and was quite unable to appear at dinner. Charles, at the moment sufficiently occupied with his own thoughts to be very indifferent about Amy, received this account of her without much demonstration of displeasure. He came in to ask what was the matter, and to hope significantly that she would find herself well enough to join the rest of the family to-morrow; and so went away, with a passing benediction in his own mind, to his own toilette and thoughts, at that moment a thousand times more interesting to him than any new folly or misadventure of his wife.

Madge watched her patient all the evening, though with fears of fever and serious illness, which, fortunately, were not justified; and both the other ladies, as soon as they left the dinner-table, came to visit Amy. While Mrs. Maria stood compassionately by her bedside expressing her own conviction that Charles had been worrying her about uncle Molyneux, Madge breathed her own confession into the ear of Gertrude. It was she who had induced poor Amy to go to prayer in the chapel; there, either cold or fright had overpowered the delicate sensitive creature; and Madge was greatly troubled with the thought that it was *her* fault. Gerty sent in immediately a supply of hot water enough to have drowned, not to say scalded, twice over, her unfortunate sister-in-law; swept downstairs to the housekeeper's room, to induce Mrs. Apsley to prepare immediately with her own hands the delicate white-wine whey, for which that dignified person was famous; insisted upon the warm bath and sleeping draught for which she had thus provided the materials; carried off arbitrarily in her own embrace the baby, whom she contrived to please

and pacify; sent everybody out of the room, even Madge herself; drew the curtains; shaded the light; and ordered Amy to sleep.

This rule and authority somehow did more for the patient than gentle Madge's cares and sympathy, though Madge was a better nurse by far on ordinary occasions than Gerty. Behind her curtains, knowing that watcher in her room, Amy fell into dreams and dozes, strangely confused and troubled in their varieties of pain—dreams in which she saw herself travelling down that dreadful Rhine, stunned and heart-broken, forsaking her child; yet dreams which bore another aspect, a twofold vision, where another self, who was more like Gerty, rose up in yonder dreadful, not-to-be-forgotten dawn, leaped firm ashore, as Gerty would have done, and went back, brave, and solitary, and undaunted, to take the baby again to her faithful mother's arms. Then they melted into each other, these strange, remorseful fancies. Gerty was there outside the curtains, sitting still in her youthful certainty of rule, waiting to know that her patient was asleep; and, aware of that, a strange influence subdued Amy. She slept a sleep of comfort and restoration before her young sister had kept an hour's watch by her side.

Where Gertrude sat with all her mind bent upon the question—What had Charley done to his wife?

CHAPTER XXIII.

"CHARLES," said Mrs. Maria, next morning, taking her brother-in-law aside after he had received at the breakfast-table everybody's congratulations upon the recovery of his wife, who, however, was ordered by Gerty not to appear at breakfast, an order which the discontented husband did not choose to countermand—"Charles," said Mrs. Maria, "I dare say you have enough to look after and to think of, in expectation of your uncle, whom you have not seen for so many

years ; I am a very prudent person, I have a great deal more discretion than the young ladies. Will you give me charge of your wife ? ”

“ You ? I should certainly be but too glad if you would undertake it,” said Crawford, with a little astonishment, and a keen second glance to detect “ the motive ” of an offer so unlooked for ; but there was no “ motive,” only her usual good-humor, with its usual tinge of drollery and ridicule, in Mrs. Maria’s blooming moon-face.

“ I shall be very pleased to undertake it, but on condition that you are not to interfere with us, nor to give any advice, nor to meddle at all with my tactics—and especially that you are not to breathe a whisper in Mrs. Charles’ presence,” said Mrs. Maria, peremptorily, but gaily, “ of uncle Molyneux.”

Crawford colored, bowed a little ceremoniously, and assented ; then after a moment, coming back again, made a virtue of necessity, and did his best to get himself gracefully out of the bad position in which the family opinion had evidently placed him.

“ To tell the truth,” he said, in a confidential tone, “ I am exceedingly anxious that Amy should at least not *displease* my uncle ; you know how much depends upon it for me ; and I am sure I could not leave her in more judicious hands.”

Then he bowed again and went away.

“ I am to consider my hand kissed, I suppose,” said Mrs. Maria to herself, “ and feel flattered accordingly : how like he is to his father in some things, and, Heaven be praised ! how unlike Joe ! ”

With which self-congratulation she went upstairs to find Amy in her dressing-gown, obediently but with visible difficulty swallowing her breakfast under Gerty’s sovereign orders. Mrs. Maria gave a remarkable proof of her real kindness and good intentions by making no remark, save by a twinkle of her eye, upon this scene, which she did not interfere with immediately, but only gave Gerty to understand after a due interval and very quietly, that she had undertaken the charge of the patient. She was not what is generally understood as an unselfish woman, nor positively benevolent, so far as actions went, but she was good-humored,

wanted nothing in her own person from her husband's rich relation, thought it a great pity that her husband's brother should lose by any chance his long-anticipated fortune, and was very willing to help him on by all the practicable means in her power. Then it was very evident that Charley hugely mismanaged matters, so far as his wife was concerned. Mrs. Maria was convinced she could do it a great deal better, and had a dislike to know of anybody suffering or in discomfort without absolute occasion. Thus without any very exalted motives, and totally innocent of any unfriendly one, she had made her proposal, and proceeded after her own way to put it in execution now.

Accordingly, without making any show of her intentions, she took possession of Amy as soon as the invalid was dressed : managed during the whole day to keep her so fully occupied that she had no time for thought ; kept by her wherever Amy wished to go ; drove her out, " a short quiet drive all by ourselves," in Mrs. Maria's own pony carriage ; told her droll stories of everybody, among the rest of uncle Molyneux, " whom, by-the-by, we are to see at dinner to-day, my dear," and about whom she even succeeded in tempting Amy to laugh ; and kept her carefully all day long from the remainder of the family. Nothing could be more satisfactory than Mrs. Maria's success. Amy was in a state of natural revulsion from an extreme shock ; she had suffered more than she ought to have suffered on the previous day, and something of unconscious natural indignation, involuntary self-defence, gave her a partial and temporary support. The worst accusation that could be cast upon her had been said ; her spirit had risen in a certain forlorn and momentary rebound. She answered to the guidance of her cheerful sister-in-law better than Mrs. Maria could have hoped, leaving that excellent woman in amazement at the very slight terror of uncle Molyneux which she betrayed. After all, perhaps there was another reason for her sudden illness and fainting-fit : perhaps Charley had been too harshly judged. Mrs. Maria, like Gerty, began to suspect the presence of something more than was apparent between Charley and his wife.

A habit of involuntary deference to her husband's wish

would have made Amy attentive to her dress that evening in any circumstances, not from any idea of pleasing him, but simply because it was his will, and she yielded to that an unconscious obedience. This evening she went further, she almost looked well in her temporary fictitious strength. Yesterday's conversation, with its bitter reproach and terrible pangs, had lifted her completely above uncle Molyneux. She was as calm in regard to him as she had been when she came to Rookley, before she knew what kind hearts were here. Her thoughts, even in this day's rebound, were occupied with matters so much more important, that the coming of this stranger cost her little anxiety. If her husband had meant to fortify her entirely from all apprehensions of his formidable relative, he could not have more completely succeeded. Even Mrs. Maria, who waited for Amy, and took her into the drawing-room under her own expansive wing, was amazed at her self-possession. It was almost greater than she could comfortably take credit for, or attribute to her own excellent management. The drawing-room was very partially lighted that evening; the whole family had possessed themselves with the idea that Amy was so timid of the formidable presence of uncle Molyneux, and this was another kind contrivance to lighten the embarrassment of the introduction.

The meeting between Charles himself and his godfather had gone off very well, as Joe reported to his wife, and Joe himself was at the present moment confiding to the stranger the fluttering timidity with which Charley's wife—"a pretty little woman whom Gerty has fallen desperately in love with, and whom we all like extremely"—regarded her approaching introduction to himself. Uncle Molyneux pshawed and poohed a little, but was not displeased; and when Mrs. Maria entered the drawing-room, perfectly punctual and in good time, as the old epicure loved to see everybody around him, he looked with favorable eyes at the pretty little figure which stood abashed but not awkward in the shadow of Joe's buxom wife, looking young, and slight, and girlish, by contrast, with that portly presence, and making her timid curtsy with a certain pathos and appeal in it, as the imperious old bachelor thought. After all, in spite of all displeasure, he had been

pleased to see Charley, whom the custom of half a lifetime had made him regard as unalterably his heir. He had a still more secret and unacknowledged pleasure in the consciousness that Charley too had an heir, and that *his* name and family were secure, whatever might become of Rookley; and when Charley's wife, the little girl whom Charley had married for love—the young creature who had brought two little pillars of manhood already into the world to keep up the race—dropped her girlish curtesy before him, his heart was touched after its fashion. He put out his big hand out of his pocket, and grasped the little slender one that met it so timidly with a hearty pressure.

"Very glad to see you, my dear; trust we shall be very good friends," said uncle Molyneux, and, to save himself and her from further embarrassment, turned immediately to Joe, who could scarcely restrain a murmur of applause.

After that formidable passage, Amy got softly to a sofa without any further perils. How uncle Molyneux appeared to Amy was a different matter. He was greatly different from the idea she had formed of him before Crawford drove all ideas on the subject out of her head. He was a large man, with an expansive white waistcoat, always somewhat loose about the chest above the buttons, a defect which Stultz himself could not have remedied in the waistcoats of Mr. Molyneux. He was of the old school, as he chose to let most strangers know by way of indemnifying himself for certain circumstances of his wealth which were of no antiquity. He wore pockets in his trousers, and one of his hands always in one of them. He had a somewhat florid large face; a rapid utterance, not always perfectly intelligible; small feet, which he was proud of, which scarcely seemed sufficient to bear the mass of a man that rested on them, and which it was hard to suspect of gout. This was uncle Molyneux as he appeared to Amy, who looked at him from her sofa very quietly with no fright in her eyes. She began to think as she sat still, and Mrs. Maria permitted her to "recover herself," how much the welfare of her babies was said to rest upon this man's will, and to be vaguely thankful to him for having spoken to her kindly. That evening Gerty was late on purpose—late, be-

cause she meant to occupy uncle Molyneux's attention from Amy; to delude him into abusing herself, which he did heartily, and being assaulted in turn—all for the sake of poor Amy, who had never been less frightened in her life than when she sat with her preoccupied thoughts trying to eat her dinner, with only one individual interposed between her and the formidable presence of uncle Molyneux.

When the ladies went back to the drawing-room, Mrs. Maria, in her wisdom, would not allow the impetuous Gertrude to throw her arms round Amy, and congratulate her on having behaved so beautifully.

"You will only frighten her again," said that judicious woman.

The drawing-room was bright enough now, with its ruddy fire and full lights. They beguiled Amy into a pretty low chair, with a soft lamp upon a little table, and her work to amuse her; pretty work—work especially selected for the purpose; and Gerty, for once moving as softly as Madge could have done, went about making up a stealthy tableau, arranging everything around and about her little sister-in-law. Uncle Molyneux liked pretty things of every description, and Gerty knew his taste exactly, and composed her picture for his special eye. The only fear was that uncle Molyneux might frighten the pretty tableau out of its senses by talking to it, which was strenuously to be prevented. Uncle Molyneux accordingly put the ladies into a flutter of terror by marching straight up to it, after an approving second glance, and little "hum, hum," of approbation; but the large man, being a little shy in his own person, and having actually nothing to say to his new niece, and no genius for general conversation with unknown young ladies, relieved them of his own accord, after a quiet reply from Amy to his solitary remark, by marching off. Nothing further happened to alarm Gerty for some time; then uncle Molyneux launched forth into enthusiastic praise of a new dish—a local dish, an inimitable something made of milk and eggs, at the end of which the whole party were petrified by a voice—"a very pretty voice," uncle Molyneux called it—uttering gently, but distinctly, the astounding words, "*I can make it.*" Yes, there could be no doubt about the fact.

It was Amy who had said this! When that universal start and stir arose, and uncle Molyneux himself started up in all his bulk and fulness to inquire into the statement, it was even repeated once more.

"If uncle Molyneux pleases," said Amy, quietly, "I can tell the cook how it is made; or, if he would like it," she added, with a little increase of timidity, "I should be very glad to make it for him myself."

"Like it!" cried uncle Molyneux. "Hallo, Charley! ring the bell, there's a good fellow, and order my man to bring my cooking apparatus—like it, you little fairy! to be sure I shall like it. What a famous little woman! Charley's luck, as I always said! Can't spare you long at Rookley, you two young people; you must come to the Hall. Why don't you ring the bell?"

And it was only the strongest remonstrance on the part of Mr. Crawford which prevented the full exhibition of uncle Molyneux's silver saucepan and cooking materials in the Rookley drawing-room.

Amy's fortune was made!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMY's fortune was made; but how about her husband? *He* was as much dissatisfied with the whole matter, as he would have been with any other result of the encounter between his wife and uncle Molyneux: with an inconsistency very natural to him, and indeed comprehensible enough, he was as much annoyed by her success with his relative, as he would have been with her failure. When her three sisters-in-law kissed Amy all round to demonstrate, each in her own fashion, their pleasure and congratulations, when honest Joe told the same story by the hearty grasp he gave her hand, and when even Mr. Crawford himself disclosed his satisfaction by a more than usually benignant good night, Charles was the only person totally without either pleasure or congratulation.

He did not like the idea of owing that invitation to Molyneux Hall to his wife, even of having it addressed to her, even of hearing her included in it as a principal. It was well enough that she should go as his wife with his other needful baggage, as she came to Rookley, included as a matter of course; but anything else was positively distasteful to him—he who had done his best to frighten her out of her wits, and thrust her back remorselessly into a deeper depth of anguish than she had yet known, all by way of preparing her to meet and please his uncle Molyneux!

Amy *had* pleased that formidable uncle, but she had not pleased her husband. A solitude of three years spent along with her, in which the only people who paid any respect to her good qualities were people whom Crawford despised, had unfortunately given him an entire contempt, as well as a certain rooted sentiment of opposition and antagonism only to be cultivated in solitude, for his wife. To him her faults were more bearable than those tame womanish, dowdy virtues, for which the good people of Willesham “respected” Mrs. Crawford;—as now perhaps he could have put up scornfully with her entire break-down and failure, while the fact of uncle Molyneux’s favorable notice, and the flattering interpretation which the whole family put upon it, sent a petty javelin of vexation to his heart. They gave her credit for having made her way in such an unexampled manner to uncle Molyneux’s affections,—they laughed and applauded her volunteer statement about the cookery as such a stroke of genius,—they congratulated her so, in their well-meaning ignorance, for having so much advanced her husband’s cause; advanced *his* cause! helped *him* on with uncle Molyneux, whom he had known and been favored by all his life!—and while they spoke their insulting compliments, they expected *him* to be pleased!

As for Amy, she was already failing and sinking out of her momentary courage. There was not elasticity enough left in her to endure longer than a day. When she slept and dreamed that night, she no longer saw the vain vision—the vision, fruitless and delusive, which yet had a half craze of comfort in it—that other self of hers, which was Gerty—that imaginary mother who left the fatal Rhine stream with her

husband in it, and went back to claim her child; Amy only saw herself that night as she went over in her sleep that dismal scene,—only herself and never another, yielding, consenting, going away, always farther and farther from the deserted cradle and the baby asleep. Her success with uncle Molyneux did not exhilarate *her*—no flutter of hope put new strength into her mind when the next morning woke her to another day—the little revulsion of strength which she had was gone—she was guilty, guilty, guilty! it was she who was to blame.

Uncle Molyneux, who did not know much of Amy, nor was anxious to know much of her, who was perfectly content to find her presentable and pleasant to look at, and by no means solicitous to engross the attentions of Charley, or to put herself at all in the way, was extremely content with the stranger. He was an open-air man, full of bustle and perpetual occupation, ready to look at everything, to give his opinion on everything, to meddle and interfere with all his big bulk and active mind wherever he was. He liked female society too, in his own fashion; he liked Gerty, who lost no opportunity of assailing him, and whom he unhesitatingly assailed; he liked the kind of creature which he called “a fine woman,” the dauntless belle of a racecourse or country-ball, to whom he could pay broad, old-fashioned compliments, and who was loud to acknowledge that Mr. Molyneux was a privileged person, and could say what he pleased, and besides these, he loved the domestic tableau as Gertrude had arranged it last night. He liked a pretty little person in a low chair doing pretty needlework. Such a piece of dainty furniture in a room made the apartment somehow warmer and more habitable, bachelor as he was, to uncle Molyneux. He was by no means exacting in his requirements; he did not require the domestic divinity to talk, or exert herself. He had no extreme anxiety to know what sort of an intellect his new niece had, if she was clever or stupid. She had quite gone beyond his expectations last night in respect to that piece of cookery he longed for; for the rest he was perfectly satisfied, and quite incurious about further discoveries; so it by no means troubled uncle Molyneux that all the next day he *scarcely once* heard the sound of the little woman’s voice,—

he had really no strong desire to hear it, nor much curiosity on the subject. He was a man for whom a first impression was all that was needful in such a matter. He was no way called upon to inquire if Charley was happy, or his wife was good enough for him: never had a more innocent bugbear been held up to any terrified woman than uncle Molyneux.

But if that new comer was easily satisfied on the subject, not so were the three sisters-in-law, who last night had rejoiced over Amy's success as over a triumph of their own. Mrs. Maria was confounded, Gerty indignantly curious, and Madge full of a gentle anxiety, perfectly distinct from theirs. What had befallen Amy in that solitary chapel? what extraordinary revelation had come to her sweet ignorance and sorrowful heart? The shock at first, the subsequent rebound, the added melancholy now, were just such symptoms as might show themselves in the heroine of a vision. What celestial impression had been made upon the mind of the pensive convert? what had she seen? Madge wrote an entire description of the strange occurrence to her one great authority, and received for answer an acknowledgment that everything was certainly possible to faith, but that such ecstatic visions were only to be received in the present matter-of-fact and sceptical age on the most undoubted authority; and that it was quite within possibility, that Mrs. Charles, if so delicate and sensitive, had been overpowered by the mingled physical and spiritual influences of the place, the awe and the chill,—an extremely sensible deliverance; with which, however, for the first time, the disciple was greatly disappointed. She would rather that *he* had taken her own view of the case.

In the meantime, the arrival of uncle Molyneux made a speedy difference at Rookley. He was too rapid and bustling to stay long at any one place; and the dinner-parties and celebrations of his visit, which the family owed to his dignity and their own, had to be crowded into a very limited space. Uncle Molyneux rode to the meet of the hounds, attended an agricultural gathering, went twenty miles across country to make a half-hour's call, and came home to meet a party at dinner, in the highest feather, unconscious of having at all exerted himself, and entirely in his element. At dinner, deep

as was his devotion to the good things on the table, he plunged into every argument with a dogmatic zeal and certainty, and a "depend upon it, sir," which made irritable men half frantic, and amused and edified the bystanders. There was not a subject in earth or heaven which uncle Molyneux would not have taken upon himself to decide with his "depend upon it, sir." He was by no means an ignorant umpire either; the chances were that, upon most subjects under discussion, uncle Molyneux knew rather more of both sides of the question than the persons who discussed them. Quiet country gentlemen had little chance against the bustling expedition and universal knowledge of this burly dogmatist. He made himself heard over all the Rookley table, and hushed it into respectful listening, by means of his loud voice, and loud opinion, and a certain arbitrary good sense and hasty judgment, which even his adversaries could not call in question.

Before he had been two days among the Crawfords, all the thoughts of the family had changed their course, and settled upon the stranger, whose moral force and influence somehow could never be disjoined from his bigness, and the impetus and rush of his physical qualities. He completely blotted out and obliterated from the firmament the pale little star called Amy, with all its mysterious aberrations. Neither Gertrude nor Mrs. Maria found any further time to speculate about their sister-in-law, or to imagine what Charley had done to his wife. Charley himself was so fully occupied and drawn out of himself, and at the same time so greatly elevated in his hopes, that his temper improved as a natural consequence. Amy was allowed to sink into her natural obscurity, distinguished by a kind salutation now and then, a "Well, little woman!" from uncle Molyneux, and far from forgotten by the universal housekeeper, who exulted in making it apparent that she had still time for all her common amusements and businesses; but Amy's frights and Amy's misadventures were for the moment discussed no more.

CHAPTER XXV.

"So they tell me you wanted to stand for Hocking, Charley; wanted to betray your father into all the expenses of an election, a fellow of a younger son that's been and married for love," said uncle Molyneux: "bold enough of *you*, let me tell you, after an absence of six, seven, how many years? besides, that's made over already and settled on your brother Joe."

"Who should only like to see anybody try to put him in possession, that's all," said Joe, in a parenthesis.

"I trust we may still see things as suitably arranged," said Mr. Crawford, whose suavity and politeness, and thin erect old figure, made him an admirable foil to his burly and big speaking relative. "Joe, I am sorry to say, has none of that readiness to serve his country which every gentleman of family ought to show; but I am sure you will agree with me, my dear Molyneux, that a country town like Hocking could not have a more unsuitable representative than the present—I mean the late member for the borough."

"I am not so certain of that," said uncle Molyneux. "He's a denuded clever fellow, and a very rising man in his profession. Shouldn't wonder to see him Lord Chancellor in my lifetime, and that will be quick work. He's not your old orthodox county town representative, to be sure; but a great deal more of a public man than you'll ever make, Joe."

"Bravo, uncle! don't be afraid of a good round shot to take the wind out of my sails," cried Joe; "you couldn't do anything more agreeable to *me*."

"The best one can say for Joe is that he's an honest fellow," continued the strictly impartial uncle Molyneux; "but born to be humbugged, as sure as he lives. Precisely one of those famous good honorable majorities that are taken in by one side and another, and drag the chariot for their betters. Depend upon it, sir," said the ruthless plain-speaker, "Edwards, with a solicitor-generalship within reach, is not a man to be ousted by Joe."

"Bravo, uncle!" repeated Joe, clapping his hands, and turning with a secret chuckle to Mrs. Maria, who was rather red, and had something sharper than usual bursting from her lips. Uncle Molyneux left no time, however, for her lady-like bitterness.

"He don't like it besides," said this uncompromising meddler in other men's affairs, speaking with his mouth full of an exquisite *pâti*, which the ungrateful gourmand owed to Joe's indignant wife: "always was a fellow of sense in his own concerns. If I were you, Crawford, I'd go in for Charley, and leave your elder son in peace."

"I beg your pardon, Molyneux," said the old gentleman, hesitating with surprise and anger; "I generally find myself tolerably well able to manage my own affairs, flattered as I may be by your partiality for Charley."

"Stuff!" said the big revolutionary. "Partiality for Charley is neither here nor there: everybody knows what Charley's been to me, more vexation than comfort, as he's tolerably well aware. Why, I haven't seen the fellow, my heir as he means to be, for these seven years; shouldn't have seen him now if you hadn't had him here; never so much as heard a word from him when he made that ridiculous marriage of his—no offence to you, little woman. A nice thing to talk of *my* partiality for Charley! But I've got my eyes about me. I know that a fellow like Charley, knocking about the world, with nothing but his allowance, an expensive rascal, up to all sorts of mischief—I tell you I know that a fellow like that, when he comes to himself, with some brains, and lots of experience, has fifty times the chance of making his way, either in Parliament or anywhere else, that an honest, good-hearted, easy-going country gentleman like my excellent friend Joe has."

"I fear, uncle, you do me but too much credit, though I should not accuse you of *partiality*," said Crawford, with an equivocal smile.

"Ha! ha! ha! he doesn't like it," said uncle Molyneux; "wants to make you believe it's all a libel, and that he's as innocent a man as his brother. You ladies may open your eyes if you will, but I happen to know better. I know what

the life of a young fellow about town is, as well as any man. However, there you have my opinion; I don't pretend to be infallible; but that's what I would do. He knows what it is to live by his wits, and understands humbug. Depend upon it, sir, you ought to go in for Charley, and run him against all the world!"

"And do you mean to tell me, sir," said Mr. Crawford, who, if all stories were true, had entered into the follies of early life as deeply as most people, but who was a model father and impersonation of propriety now, "do you mean to tell me, a father, sir, as well as a voter, and with the deepest interests involved, that such a man as you have described—a description which I trust does not apply to my son Charley—is a safe man to represent an important interest in Parliament, to help to make laws for his virtuous fellow-subjects, and to govern such men, sir, as you and me?"

"Pshaw! as for that I'm willing to take my chance," said uncle Molyneux, carelessly sweeping off with his napkin some crumbs which had fallen upon the full lappets of his coat, and thrusting back his chair from the table in significant intimation that he had finished breakfast, and did not in the least intend to wait for anybody else. "I suspect it'll take a cleverer fellow than Charley, and a wiser device than Parliament, to govern either of the two of us. However, that's not my concern. I've told you only what *I* would do."

With which words, uncle Molyneux got up, shook the steady floor under the sharp rapid creak of his small foot and hasty march, and went off out of the breakfast-room with the square heavy skirts of his coat swaying behind him, to write letters for the early post.

"I trust, father," said Crawford, secretly exulting, yet concealing his satisfaction as well as he could under an appearance of annoyance, "that you do not attribute to me any share in what has just been said by my uncle Molyneux. He has certainly not been over complimentary to myself."

"I don't blame *you*, Charley; no, no, certainly not," said his father, with a look of vexation. "As for your uncle Molyneux, we all know him. I trust nobody here will suffer themselves to be disturbed by what he has said."

So saying, Mr. Crawford followed his guest's example, and withdrew, but with a much less certain step, leaving every body *much* disturbed by what uncle Molyneux had said, as he knew very well, and as they all knew.

Though there was certainly no reason why a relative not of the closest, and from whom only one of the party had expectations, should influence them all so seriously, it is quite certain that uncle Molyneux never did discharge any of his contradictory, unsettling propositions in Rookley without producing a most marked and decided effect. This assault was not premeditated or concerted with anybody; uncle Molyneux never worked in conjunction with any man, and could not have done it of *malice prepense*; but he always held by his sudden opinion with the most unconquerable tenacity, and never showed the faintest intention of change, save when everybody yielded to him. Joe took his brother aside into the window to express his own perfect concurrence in uncle Molyneux's deliverance, and to plan with Charles more gentle means of carrying out this project. The ladies clustered together to discuss the matter among themselves. Mrs. Maria was the only savage and unconvinced person present. She, alone, was ready with desperate bravery to snatch up and fling from the window, before it did further mischief, uncle Molyneux's burning shell.

But Fate herself could not have spoken in accents more certain of ultimate success. Within a day or two everybody had given in. In less than a week it was publicly known that Mr. Crawford of Rookley's younger son contested the borough of Hocking, where his address was to be read on all the walls. Uncle Molyneux himself prolonged his visit to throw himself into the contest; even Mrs. Maria melted, and became an important canvasser for Charley. A new era seemed about to rise upon Crawford's renewed life and rising hopes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAPID dissolution of Parliament, got up to save, if possible, a Government from its fate, and to modify or reverse the fatal decision of an adverse vote, is an incident sufficiently familiar to us in these later days to need little description. But politics ran higher at the period when Charles Crawford contested the borough of Hocking: many things which are only names and recollections now, were then in real existence, and the "country party" stood fast upon bulwarks which every man, according to his own declaration, would die rather than yield—bulwarks the very outlines of which have so crumbled into the dust, that it is hard to put them together again, even in imagination.

Whig and Tory meant something in these days. It was too soon after the era of the Reform Bill to have left time for the politicians of that excited period to grow old and eclectic, as is the natural fate of statesmen. They still nailed their colors to the mast and disdained compromise. They were still Tories and Whigs, with hereditary principles and traditional policy; consequently an election cost a great deal of money at that time, necessitated an immense deal of labor, and was, in fact, a very troublesome operation. No wonder if the disappointed candidate, who had set his hopes upon success, and exhausted all the endeavors of his friends, was deeply chagrined and mortified beyond measure to be obliged to acknowledge in his own county, and within ten miles of his father's house, the humiliating minority in which he stood at the end of the poll.

For it was Mr. Edwards' own party who were at present aspiring to office. Mr. Edwards, who had already represented the borough for three years, and who had important friends in the municipality and amongst those townfolk whom Rookley, and the county candidate, turned up their honorable noses at. It was Mr. Edwards' party who, after a long deposition, were looking forward to the delights of

office and the advantages of patronage. Before the very eyes of the threatened member, over his very head, hung the laurel wreath of Solicitor-General, the first step in the road which led to the woolsack. Was it likely that he would spare a single weapon of warfare to succeed in the conflict which promised himself so much? Who was his opponent? A young man, perfectly unknown and untried, who did not seem even to have so clear a knowledge of his own political principles as became a man who sought the confidence and suffrages of the independent and intelligent electors of Hocking. Were they, after tasting the sweets of freedom, to yield their dearly bought and precious independence to the dictation of a private family, or the fatal and deadening sway of county influence? Mr. Edwards was a very clever and rising man; nobody knew better all the popular humbug that told on such occasions. He knew enough of his opponent's antecedents to be able to demolish the gravity of Crawford's pretensions, to the great satisfaction and edification of the Hocking burgesses. He himself was no exhausted man of fashion, no idler tired of idleness, no reformed rake who had sown his wild oats and come home to have his debts paid and conciliate his friends by "serving his country." In short, despite the thundering hustings speech of uncle Molyneux; the warm support of honest Joe, whose popularity nobody could gainsay; the family friends who, if somewhat lukewarm in their devotion, still gave votes and interest; and the less visible but still important domestic influence boldly and freely exercised by Gerty and Mrs. Maria, the sudden canvass was a failure; and Charley Crawford had the satisfaction of knowing his father to have spent a much greater sum upon this whim than upon that of the chapel, which was perhaps the only comfort which the rejected candidate could take out of the whole affair.

However, it was impossible to deny that the canvass, unproductive as it was, the hopes and the excitement and the occupation, had improved Charley. He was no longer the sullen cynic of the Willeham cottage; the pettier sentiments which had swayed him there, lightened from him now.

A disappointed man set down perennially in the society of

a melancholy woman, finding no outlet for himself or his own powers, doing nothing, able to do nothing, except scowl at the superior "luck" of other people, and grow into a constantly increasing antagonism and perpetual smouldering irritation with his wife, who gradually appeared to him as the source of all his misfortunes, was such a person as could be fostered and kept in being only in the solitude and confined atmosphere of such a place. Many an honest, cheerful man flourished and prospered in Willesham. There was nothing in the sweet English air of that pretty village to make anybody misanthropical; but it was totally uncongenial with Crawford's previous life and habits; he had a scorn of its innocent pleasures, a contempt for its restricted society, and an intolerable mortified feeling of being there only because the greater world was closed to him, and he was in disgrace.

This he had now got the better of; he was restored to his proper place, his old associations, the society in which he was born. His very feelings to Amy changed. Whether or no it might happen to be unjust to *her*—a very secondary consideration—to consider his marriage the source of all his misfortunes, and the permanent clog of his life,—it was at least unworthy of himself to display any such idea. He began to recognize himself once more as a man whom half-a-dozen dowdy wives, or all the foolish women in Christendom, could not permanently crush or overcloud; he recovered confidence in his own good fortune and fascinations. Nothing now could have betrayed him into the bitter malice of such an assault as that which he had made upon Amy before his uncle arrived.

Amy fell into her natural position, as her husband's social sourness yielded to something more resembling his former self; she became simply his wife, the nearest of his dependants, a being necessary to him, whose comforts must be looked after to a certain extent, and her dignity supported. Without knowing it, he softened into a familiar civility which answered very well for friendly conjugal intercourse: he had no longer leisure to be always criticizing. Love, if it had ever been there, had long ago dropped out of their firmament, but this pair began now to fall quietly into the number of

those other pairs, of whom there are plenty in the world, who manage to get on very well without.

Uncle Molyneux, who was a law to himself, and remained so perfectly convinced that Charley was the man to oppose Edwards, now when Charley was beaten, as when he himself had put him in nomination at the Rookley breakfast-table, became more and more thoroughly reconciled to the heir, whom his odd and eccentric sentiment of honor would never have permitted him to disinherit, but whom he had been quite disposed to punish by the utter silence and neglect of years, until they met, and nature and old use and wont got the better of him. Mr. Molyneux had been greatly wounded and mortified by the withdrawal of his young relative, and by the long silence which he maintained; but somehow even Charley's neglect and indifference contributed towards the original principle of "The fellow's been brought up to succeed me, sir; and, by Jove, he shall succeed me!" with which he established his kinsman's unalterable position, in his own colloquies with himself.

"If the fellow had been always fawning about me, conciliating and flattering and wheedling the old man that's to leave him all his money, I'd have had a deuced deal worse opinion of him," was the reflection even of his vexation when Charley disappeared. "He does me more justice, this rascal does. Who the deuce do you suppose wants his gratitude or fiddle-faddle? But I'll frighten him out of his senses yet, the careless villain," swore uncle Molyneux. "He shall think he's disinherited and deserted, and all the rest of it. Let him starve or go to prison; he shall have no help from me."

However, this singularly indulged heir neither went to prison nor starved. So far as uncle Molyneux and the family knew, disgrace had never approached within a hundred miles of him. After a little lapse of years he turned up in the distance through a mist, a hero who had married for love, the father of a boy. That boy took the breath from uncle Molyneux. Before he remembered his resolution of never more seeing the culprit, he had resolved with a chuckle and secret shout of glee to bind this unconscious branch of a third gene-

ration, his heir's heir, to Molyneux Hall and his own name, and let Rookley take its chance with Joe.

The malice and triumph of this contrivance went a long way towards softening his heart. He was a big schoolboy in many things, and loved an expedient of mischief; but still he held out till Charley was known to be at Rookley, within reach of him, anxious to regain his good graces—Charley who years ago had been his own boy. Then a pretence of business came to the aid of uncle Molyneux: he was obliged to go to Rookley; he could not help himself; he had something to arrange with old Crawford; and at *his* age no business arrangement could be put off with safety. When he came, he no longer hesitated about his reception of his godson, and now that Charley was beaten, uncle Molyneux covered him with his mighty shield.

The cottage at Willesham which Amy had begun to think of returning to, half with longings for its quiet, half with terror, faded off again into the intangible distance. Within three days after the election, almost before she was aware of it, Amy and her two babies had been kissed and cried over by the Rookley ladies, and were trundling away in the cold early April weather, with Charles and his godfather, to Molyneux Hall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOLYNEUX HALL was as much unlike Rookley Place as if it had been constructed on a general principle of opposition. It was a great Lancashire mansion, the palace of a self-made man, who, if not exactly one of the *nouveaux riches*, had raised in his own person a small and decayed "county family," boasting little but a few badly managed farms and a mouldy old Grange, to one of the wealthiest houses in the county. Molyneux Hall was not built upon the site of the old house, which was in a damp hollow a little distance off, much to be

objected to on sanitary principles, though picturesque enough. If there had not been a bit of ruin at Rookley, it is probable that Molyneux Grange might have survived in spite of its mouldiness for the sake of its antiquity; but Mr. Molyneux scorned repetition, and did nothing "after" a previous work. The quaint old house, accordingly, to the great disgust of local antiquaries, had been destroyed, and there survived nothing but its grove, which was included within the grounds of the new Hall, and to which every visitor made pilgrimage.

The modern house stood on a little eminence, perfectly unsheltered on any side, a great, lofty, big, defiant, self-assisting house, with a terrace defended by a low but prodigiously heavy balustrade of stone, and a sloping lawn with ornamental shrubs in little round beds of soil dotting its surface, which descended to the shadier level of the shrubbery, where well-grown bushes and ornamental plants, American and other, which were very gay and pretty in spring, if forlorn enough at other seasons. This shrubbery, where nothing came to the height of a tree, encircled the whole, receding, however, to a farther distance behind, where the ground was higher, and where a large and elaborate flower garden, with glassy gleams of distant lines of greenhouse, opened out before the windows of the drawing-rooms, backed by the distant verdure of the old trees which once had lent shelter and dignity to the Grange.

The prospect from the front was not remarkable; the house presided over a flat country of low fields and hedges, enlivened by the windings of a river, which was so unfortunately like a canal that it did very little for the landscape. This stream, though no inconsiderable nor uninfluential member of the English river family when it came to its maturity, had at this early part of its existence as little character and expression as could possibly belong to a wholesome stream of running water. Trading barges and sloops with one tall mast and sail went sluggishly between the level green banks like half-animate creatures who had lost their way here, and were dully endeavoring to find a road out, and the stream itself drew its irregular track through field and farm, with scarcely even a gleam here and there, where the sunshine was, to tell that a

living thing full of movement and reflection was stirring there among the monstrous grass. Occasionally little groups of houses were visible along its course, not human houses but places of industry, handy for the conveyance of goods down the homely serviceable stream. Round the horizon, wherever you turned your eyes, not dismal and oppressive like the smokes and furnaces of the midland counties, but still far from lovely objects in the scene, rose chimneys of distant manufactories, diversified here and there by the cone of a glass-work, each with its veil of smoke. At one side the railway was fully visible for about a mile; the railway, one of the oldest of railways, which connected the wealthy cotton-spinning metropolis with the wealthier cotton-carrying seaport of that big Cressus of a northern shire.

Molyneux Hall, rising four stories high, with another lofty balustrade of stone veiling its highest windows, and low wings of supernumerary apartments supporting its grandeur on either side, stared all day long with its host of unwinking eyes over the head of its rhododendrons and its laurels upon this landscape: not by any means an attractive landscape, yet possessing those general charms of nature which are not to be obliterated even in the working-day centre of a money-making county; the air and sky and breadth of space, in which, despite all disadvantages, certain elements of beauty always remain.

To the bare magnificence of this arrogant house, uncle Molyneux brought his godson, who knew the place thoroughly, despised it a little, had a certain pride in its wealth and grand aspect, and could not look at it without making secret notes in his mind of the alterations to be done when it came into his own hands,—and Amy, whom its size and the total absence of anything which could soften or veil that one big vulgar quality, considerably awed, not to say scared, to begin with. She went timidly through the great hall, where the housekeeper in her brown satin gown, and the dignified butler in his spotless black suit, headed the array of servants, and was very glad to take refuge with a headache from the dazzle of windows and confusion of passages which seemed endless to her fatigue and bewilderment, in the rooms appropriated

to the children, which, if the furniture had but been a little simpler, were enough to captivate any mother's heart. No fear of the "bumps" which in more contracted apartments were always appearing upon little Edward's head. Carts were to be driven and horses dragged and balls tossed with the utmost freedom in the wide dimensions of the new nursery, where bright fires burned, and things had a holiday aspect not to be seen in any other quarter of the house.

Children were extraordinary and unaccustomed visitors at Molyneux Hall, and there were housemaid hearts in the place full of flutter at the idea of a "young family" who had not found themselves able to resist the impulse of giving what inarticulate welcome they could to the future little heirs, and propitiating the future lady. From these apartments, where she was anxiously superintending the settlement of the infants, perplexed by the London nurse's long account of "the things she should want," that dreadful list of indispensable necessities which makes "a head nurse" so sore a bugbear to poor mothers of gentility, and disturbed by constant furtive apparitions of the maids of the house eager for a sight of the babies, whom Amy did her best not to see, but who unconsciously annoyed her and aggravated her headache, she was suddenly summoned to the drawing-room.

Amy had acquired enough of discrimination now to know that she must not run down in her travelling garb, as was her first idea. She who had lost her bloom, and lost her own pleasure in her good looks, needed other cares to make up for that. She hastened to find her own apartment, to free herself from the dust and soil of the journey, to throw another shawl over her shoulders and put on another bonnet, for uncle Molyneux had desired while it was still daylight to show her the grounds.

Uncle Molyneux was never tired himself except at bedtime, and did not know what headache meant. He was chafing a little at her delay when she entered, but caught the new bonnet with his quick eye, and was pleased. That unconscious homage to his taste and to his importance flattered him, especially as he saw that the little woman was fatigued; and had humanity enough in him to divine that the improvement of

toilette was no exercise of personal vanity on Amy's part. He snatched her hand through his hasty arm, and drew her out, through glass doors which opened from the drawing-room upon the lawn.

It was a dull April afternoon, the clouds hanging low, and the air heavy with rain; nevertheless, Amy had to suit her tremulous steps as well as she could to the strides of her host's small, springy, elastic feet, and was led to see the house in all its best aspects, and to look down into the gloomy silence of the grove which once had sheltered Molyneux Grange; and only because the darkness came on, and the time of dinner approached, was excused from a round of all the hothouses, pineries, and graperies where was cultivated the matchless fruit of Molyneux Hall. That was left for to-morrow, when Amy in the twilight tottered upstairs again to dress for dinner.

There was nobody to take her part in *this* house,—no cups of tea to comfort her womanish weakness,—no droll Mrs. Maria to laugh at and defend her,—no imperious Gertrude to command her lying down and secure her peace. She was afraid even to risk the half-hour's rest on the sofa, which her own maid, softened into regard for her mistress's weakness, enjoined.

Two imperious men to please in their different manners, no sympathy or support to look for, to move about through this great house and make believe that she was one of the most important persons in it, while less at ease than any housemaid, was no very enlivening prospect to Amy. She felt her wits leaving her in her fatigue and feebleness and suffering; she became confused and bewildered in spite of herself, forgetting what to do and say, and sick at the thought of choosing which dress she should wear, and having her hair "done," and going downstairs to a solemn dinner; a weak woman, easily harrassed, troubled, and put out, without the youth and courage to sustain her which she should have had at her years; ready to cry, she could not exactly tell for what, but afraid to cry because it would make her eyes red, and somebody would observe it, which compulsory self-restraint was no small aggravation of her troubles. Then her husband

appeared out of his dressing-room as she was about to go downstairs, telling her to make haste, and impressing upon her the necessity of punctuality with uncle Molyneux.

Never had Charles and herself seemed to Amy so hopelessly apart as on that night, when he was not ill-tempered, nor sullen, nor sour, but, on the contrary, in high spirits and a benign mood, gave her his arm, and was communicative and friendly beyond his wont. But not a thought entered *his* mind of the feebleness, and loneliness, and exhaustion of the poor young woman by his side; if it had, he would have made matters worse by warning her that uncle Molyneux was not a man to experiment upon, and that headaches and faintings were out of his way. Amy knew that very well, and did not say or look, so far as she could help it, the slightest complaint; and so they went down together arm in arm, those married people, who, if one had been at the Antipodes, could not have been more entirely apart.

However, if perhaps it may be proper to pause and explain upon this subject, this separateness was no such misery to either as it might, and perhaps ought, to have been. If Crawford had a thought upon the matter, it was, that his wife did not understand him, and could not, modified by a benevolent doubt, whether any woman could, or whether a cleverer individual might not have simply pestered him more,—this was the utmost stretch of his discontent now, since he had recovered his temper and balance, by regaining what he believed his proper place. As for Amy, she did not think at all about the matter. She suffered, because she was weak, because it was necessary to make a perpetual exertion to satisfy her husband and his uncle, and because at the present moment she wanted rest; but she did not suffer because her husband was not in love with her. Married men and women, dear young people, are not always thinking upon that subject, or tormenting each other to death about it. Amy had a grim enough skeleton, poor soul! in her closet, but it had no connection with any possible Smith or Brown, whom she might have had a girlish fancy for before she was married, nor even with her husband's unkindness and lack of love. That is a heartbreak which does not last for ever, even

with the most sensitive. It made her a little more chill and lonely, a little more diffident; but she was not crying in her heart for that reason as she went downstairs.

The drawing-room was very large, indefinitely increased in size by great mirrors, and with ante-room and boudoir gleaming on either side with open doors and half-visible pictures, looking to Amy like an endless range of apartments. Uncle Molyneux took her hand and led her to an easy-chair.

"Now, little woman, you are mistress of everything, take up your sceptre, and reign; don't be afraid of *me*; you shall do what you will, and nobody shall contradict you," he said. "You are the only woman amongst us, and you shall have your will; the happier you can make yourself here, and the more you can make the place look like home, the better pleased I shall be."

Perhaps Amy got through the evening all the better for the kindness of these words, though the kindness of uncle Molyneux was arbitrary enough; but when she returned by herself to the solitary magnificence of the drawing-room, she shuddered as she looked round, wondering what possible enchantment could ever make it look like home. There she sat all night, half fainting, waiting till the gentlemen should come in, too timid to rest, afraid, if she relaxed and let herself off her guard, of crying or doing something to displease somebody; yet she was mistress here.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If Amy had been disposed, however, to take uncle Molyneux at his word, and assume the domestic sceptre, the beginning of the new reign would have raised sufficient commotion in the house to make him repent his revolutionary injunction.

The housekeeper, in her brown satin gown, with her large gold watch, the most infallible timekeeper in the house, hung outside, and her lace cap with pink ribbons, was as arbitrary and almost as unaccustomed to interference as her master.

Mrs. Aspinall was rather condescending than otherwise to Amy. Confiding her private sentiments to the butler, Mrs. Aspinall remarked, "that Mr. Charles no doubt was master's heir, but Mrs. Charles wasn't; that master having no descendants of his own, nor nobody to speak of as went before him, being but a small family in former days, there was no entail, like in great houses; and if Mr. Molyneux took it in his head, to be sure he could turn off Mr. Charles with a shilling any day as fast as look at him; and a good right, too, with his own money!" Mrs. Aspinall said. "As for the lady, she had nothing to say against her, only that she wasn't a born lady, as the blind might see, being a deal too nervish and doubtful in her ways; but it was always best to begin as you meant to end," the housekeeper continued; "and for her part, as she wasn't going to give in to Mrs. Charles, she didn't mean to pretend nothing of the sort. Thank Providence, when the master gave up, she had something laid by as would enable her to give up too. New laws and new masters didn't answer a woman at her time of life, and she didn't mean to make believe to the contrary nor seek favor; it wasn't in her nature; she couldn't say one thing and mean another, not if it was to save her life."

With a similar complimentary estimate of his own character, and doubtful commentary upon Mrs. Charles, the butler entirely concurred in Mrs. Aspinall's sentiments, and was prepared accordingly to resist innovation.

Amy, however, gave neither of them the slightest trouble. She became reconciled to Molyneux Hall by degrees; and though that house in Willesham, which had been dreary enough to her experience, gradually grew a refreshment to her imagination, and gathered about it all the charms of home which survived to her, she ceased to be alarmed by the aspect and splendor of her present dwelling-place. Spring, too, began to brighten in the gardens where little Edward, two years and a half old, could roam with guarded freedom and strict commands not to pluck the flowers; and the grass on the lawn, where he could roll and tumble at his will, began to be dry enough for safety, as Amy's anxious personal inspection assured her. These small matters comforted her woman-

ish life, and made its trials bearable. The gentlemen were absent great part of the day; which perhaps, though she never said it, was of itself a considerable amelioration. There were few neighbors, and she was greatly left to herself.

To tell the truth, there were not very many advantages of society at Molyneux Hall. A rich rector with a rich living might have been supposed something; and so he was to uncle Molyneux; but he was a bachelor and a very clever man, and consequently had no wife nor daughters to call upon Amy, and took very little notice of her in his own person. At some distance lived a family of very great people, with whom uncle Molyneux was a most welcome guest, but who were people of too much importance and distinction to be asked to Molyneux Hall simply to meet Mr. and Mrs. Charles Crawford, and necessitated other guests either of rank or celebrity which it was difficult enough to procure. An invitation to this noble house hung over Amy's head now, and had been the cause of the greatest satisfaction to her husband, who knew of old some of its sons, and perhaps thought with compunction of some of its daughters, who might possibly have been induced to share the glories of Molyneux Hall "to be near mamma." All that was over for ever; and a little of his old gall came to Crawford's mind, as he thought of the high-bred and handsome women with whom he was going to contrast his dowdy wife.

Though *that* reproach was now less deserved than ever, Amy, who had not been dowdy even when she went to Rookley, was still less subject to that accusation now, when she had forgotten any uneasiness she might have had in the dresses, which were finer and more fashionable than any she had ever worn before, and unconsciously mended some of her youthful deficiencies in the society of the family at Rookley. Uncle Molyneux was not troubled with any such thought. The Ladies Bolton were such people as he loved to meet abroad; but he liked the domestic tableau, the pretty little woman, the lamp, and the needle-work, the still figure which made a room look inhabited and comfortable, and interfered with nobody. This perhaps pleased him *most* at home. Gerty understood to perfection the taste of uncle Molyneux.

But uncle Molyneux invariably went to London in May, so that the period of this visit was limited, and no other alternative but Willesham presented itself to Crawford, with the agreeable enlivenment, of course, of constant visits to town, and all the society to which Mr. Molyneux could introduce him, which was both varied and important. This, however, was greatly less satisfactory than the important and honorable something to do which would have been given him by a seat in Parliament, and to this eager eyes were strained.

A little town in Cheshire not very far distant had shown its devotion to its neighboring and most important "interest," by returning, at the election which was just over, the dying son of the family who were dominant in that district; a son undeniably dying, whose broken and irregular attention to his parliamentary duties had been grumbled at by all the Radicals round for years. Now that long invalidism was so near its end that disguise was no longer possible; but the matter was still extremely delicate, for who could ask a man whose son still was only dying—not dead—to support another candidate for that son's office, as if the grave had really closed over him? The very proposal seemed enough to secure the aggrieved father's most urgent opposition to the hasty substitute; yet upon this Crawford fixed his eyes with all the eagerness of a man who had been once baffled, and who sees a renewed chance and an only one. He had travelled to the spot himself, made himself acquainted with all its local peculiarities, and gained all the information possible of the circumstances of its present position, ere he opened his case and laid his plans before uncle Molyneux. It was a very bold, almost unprecedented, proceeding, for uncle Molyneux did not care to have anything suggested to him, and chose to originate himself every measure which he entered warmly into. However, Crawford did the next best thing possible to him: he made a great blunder in some of his facts, which Mr. Molyneux's superior local knowledge enabled him to expose triumphantly; and, consequent upon that, so great an error in his plan and tactics, that his relative was completely mollified.

"Leave me to shape it into something that will work," he

said, in victorious contempt of his *protégé's* skill; "and perhaps it isn't such a bad plan, with *my* experience, Charley."

Charley was content to gulp the affront to his vanity, and the affair did really become practicable under the hands of uncle Molyneux, who knew everybody; and while the great man remained unapproachable, could win over the great man's agent, and principal tenant, and man of business. Anything that gave him occupation, that brought his own favorite qualities, his own character, into action, and that afforded him an opportunity to distinguish himself in the art of managing men, was welcome to uncle Molyneux. It was work for which he was really very well adapted, and he enjoyed it hugely.

This second enterprise, too, looked successful from its beginning; there was no well-known and successful candidate to oppose; the poor young member died at the most opportune and convenient moment. One of the professional Parliamentary people who had lost his seat at the general election, dropped into the field instantly with an address, the "indecent haste" of which won him the bitterest opposition of the earl, and the dislike of the loyal town, which had not yet made up its mind to have a will of its own. In short, the affair made rapid progress and came to the most happy termination. The "contest" was a sham from the beginning, and could not have alarmed the most sensitive candidate; and so, by dint of prudence and perseverance and uncle Molyneux, Crawford at last gained the present height of his hopes, and he who had left the Willesham cottage the most sullen bear in existence, almost hating his wife, and caring for nobody but little Edward, stayed a night there six months after, to see his family settled before he proceeded to town, M.P. for Fantwich, once more a polite, cheerful, and hopeful man of the world.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THIS change in the fortunes of the head of the household made a corresponding difference in the household itself, though a change much less in proportion. Crawford, now a man of occupation, was absent most of his time from his family. Much of the old agreeable freedom of his bachelor days came back to him in his new life. With his town chambers and town associations, he was almost as free for either pleasure or work as though there had been no little suburban household claiming his duty and some portion of his care. However, he had already had about enough of pleasure. He was not a sensualist by nature, in the common sense of the word; and even in his youth had enough of that paramount and all-controlling self-regard, which, in lack of higher restrictions, often keeps a proud man master of himself, to prevent either vice or amusement gaining supremacy over him. When he sinned, it was with the deeper guilt of a man who does evil because he pleases, and not because he is overcome by any overwhelming temptation. He did not please now to re-enter the common ways of dissipation; he had outgrown and outlived them. The Hesse catastrophe had given him a perennial disgust even to the attractions of the gaming-table. Now the ambition and excitement of serious life had taken possession of his understanding and spirits.

There was not a spark of original genius in the man, nor even any great breadth of ability; but he was capable, clever, acquainted with the world, full of experience of the least worthy side of human nature, and quick to observe the expediciencies and practical policy of common life. Then, as both himself and his friends had discovered, with a gratification not unmingled with surprise, he was a very acceptable public speaker. A budding gift of this kind had distinguished him at Oxford, while he was still a good boy, and before his disorderly days had begun; and by a good fortune, which he certainly did not deserve, the unused and neglected quality *came when he required it*—ready to his hand.

If he did not start in the world with any great political *prestige* or previous reputation, he had some compensation for that in the fact of acquiring, through his uncle Molyneux, a most extensive political acquaintance and some influential connections. Then he made his advent at a happy moment when the general chances of a general election were over, and a new man was an unlooked-for acquisition, welcome to either side. And wise at last, Crawford took the best means of success in his new life: he went into the less showy work of it with good-will and courage. He made himself known before long to the leaders of his party, as a man not only to be relied upon, now and then, for one of those gentlemanlike, unoratorical, effective speeches, which tell more than any other description of eloquence upon the representatives of English freedom, but who was also to be trusted with dull committees, and would not shirk his work; a twofold reputation which raised him high in the estimation of those whose good opinion was fame.

Crawford was not what is commonly understood as a man of cultivated mind. He had never been a student; and though his years of seclusion at Willesham had naturally thrown him upon books, and done much towards the furnishing of his memory, his very selection of literature showed his indifference to literature for any charms of its own. His books were the books of men, who, like himself, had made the world their lesson; and though Horace and Bacon were doubtless among the number, neither Bacon nor Horace captivated this reader by their own merits, though they helped him to the refinement of his speaking and to the improvement of his thoughts.

Natural habits had given him that reticence of speech which is so often taken to represent "restrained power." Temper added that lurking neighborhood of a sneer, which is more effective in most cases than either abuse or ridicule, and always demonstrates the superiority of the critic. If he had not all the width and richness of illustration possible to men of greater cultivation than himself, he had generally a very good acquaintance with his own individual subject, whatever that might be; and much of that knowledge of the world, inexpressible and not to be exhibited in words, which showed

itself involuntarily in the very atmosphere surrounding those who possess it;—not a noble knowledge—the knowledge which even in generous minds subdues faith and kills enthusiasm; yet a knowledge true, in its wide and extensive, but superficial way—knowledge of the general weakness, meanness, and evil of humanity, without much consideration of those qualities which make the general race a collection of individuals, and none of the few greater souls which occur, few yet potent, everywhere, touching the mass with better thoughts. This was Crawford's strong point: he knew the world—knew it not in a lofty or great fashion; but as, after all, most statesmen *have* known it, and as perhaps the makers of laws, rules, and restrictions, do best to know.

Uncle Molyneux, by dint of his wealth, his position, his restlessness and ubiquity, and the remarkable points in his own character, was known to half the remarkable people in the country. He was a great politician in his own eclectic irregular way; he was a man of great influence also, not only in his county, but in the great town where his wealth had been mostly made, and in the surrounding lesser towns with every one of which he had, or had once had, some point of connection. First of all, he was the representative and head of an old family which, even in these money-making quarters, told greatly in his favor; then he was very rich—a quality which is prepossessing and full of fascination everywhere; then he had that kind of bold, original, outspoken intelligence which is always popular in England. With the strongest theoretical prejudice in favor of rank, birth, and breeding, he had in practice that total contempt and carelessness of them which gave piquancy to his old-fashioned principles, and helped to make him the type of English character which he was; and lastly, the restlessness and insatiable activity of the man, which sent him into the midst of every commotion, and gave him a hand in a hundred things with which he had nothing in the world to do, united to make him universally known, and known as a notable man. He had friends on both sides of every moot question; friends in both parties; had plunged over head and ears into popular agitations and excitements on behalf of public projects which took his fancy, without inquiring first which

party in the State originated them ; and no party scorned the aid which was bestowed as his own opinion and fancy suggested, and according to no definite rule.

Uncle Molyneux had the power accordingly to bring his relative and *protégé* acquainted with the most important conflicting influences of the State. He was able to introduce the new member into circles which new members, unless highly distinguished, are not very apt to reach ; and pleased beyond his expectations as he was, to see at once his heir's ambition and his industry, he left nothing undone which could contribute to Charley's success.

Crawford had a much more distinct set of political opinions than his active and restless godfather. By private inclination and hereditary precedent, he belonged to that Conservative party which in those days was the Tory party, and had but begun to drift from its original constitutional moorings. The new politician had not sufficient strength of individual opinion to set out on his own standing ground as an independent member ; his natural tendency instead was to stand very closely by the leaders of his party, and work towards the chance of becoming one of them, with no erratic inclinations out of that understood and settled creed ; but he found himself unconsciously identified with Mr. Molyneux before he was aware. He perceived that a certain reflection of his godfather hung about him by an association involuntary with those who showed it ; and it struck Crawford as a very wise stroke of policy to take advantage of this. He chose his *rôle* after long reflection, and was not long in making it apparent.

Mr. Molyneux was great in the infant Social Science, then only in its bud, as was to be expected from the man. Mr. Crawford, after serious consideration of the horizon of the future and the chances that brightened it, gave the world to understand that herein was his exceptional ground. He was faithful to his party, devoted to his leaders, obedient to his whipper-in, on every other public question ; but this was "Crawford's hobby." No measure of social reform, be it virulent Radical, or still more dangerous Whig, was to be lightly spoken of before Mr. Crawford. He was the champion of the most Quixotic justice, the most insane public

liberality. From sewers to factory children, he took the whole into his capacious bosom. He could not pledge himself to support his party *here*. He would not permit it to be supposed that political considerations could weigh with him in the face of a clear and ascertained duty. And in a very short time he had settled his freedom and privileges on this point. With such elevated principles he commenced public life, a man, as the Cheshire papers said, from whom everything was to be expected; a young politician of the highest promise, as everybody assured uncle Molyneux, who, from mere indulgence, and forgiveness, and patronage, came to take quite a personal credit in the proceedings of the new member, and became gradually very proud of his heir.

Mr. Molyneux was himself a bachelor: it did not occur to him as strange that Crawford should begin almost as a bachelor his new career. On the contrary, it was perfectly reasonable, and a sign of the greatest good sense: a young family were better anywhere than in London—better a thousand times in the pleasant suburban village, where they were always accessible, than in the confined rooms and indifferent accommodation of an expensive house, too small for them, and twice too dear, in a fashionable London street; and it was extremely well that the new member and his wife showed so much philosophy and prudence. And so of course it was; but not a very usual virtue even among those ordinary masses of married people who grumble and thwart each other manfully when together, but don't contrive to manage at all apart.

Crawford's motives were clear enough, however. He could live very comfortably without his wife's society, and subsisted with great satisfaction on weekly or fortnightly glimpses of her; but she was not such a wife as would or could take her part in the up-hill battle of a rising public man,—she could not by the most distant chance aspire to influence Fashion or even to pursue it. It would be impossible to warm her to the length of leaving her babies, for the delights and labors of a London season. When the time came, the lady of Molyneux Hall would take a certain place, wherever she was, or whatever she might be; but at present there was little occasion

for transferring to London, at a much increased expense, the nursery, which was much better at Willesham, and the wife who could do nothing to help her husband's success.

So Crawford gave up fashion and the fine world without many pangs: a married man, without his wife, could have no permanent entrance there: and gave himself up to the House and politics and the society of men, as he would have naturally preferred to do under any circumstances; and Amy and her children remained at Willesham.

CHAPTER XXX.

AMY and her children remained at Willesham, but not in the same position as they had occupied formerly there. It became known, without anybody knowing how, that Mr. Crawford, the new member for Fantwich, who had already made such favorable appearances in the House of Commons, was the same Mr. Crawford who lived at No. 1, Willesham Green, or at least that the quiet little Mrs. Crawford who remained there with her babies while her husband's duties called him to town, was the wife of that important personage, and even Mrs. Kindersley of the Hall, whose former condescensions Crawford had managed to repulse, sought Amy's acquaintance now after a different fashion, and was not denied again. Crawford had no longer any reason for declining a neighborly knowledge of the neighboring great people. He had quite regained his original place, and indeed more than that. No event in the future could be more certain than his unquestionable succession to the glories and honors of Molyneux Hall. His relations with Rookley were of the most satisfactory kind. Uncle Molyneux's satisfaction with the turn which matters had now taken expressed itself in the substantial form of a very considerable and regular addition to the income of his heir. So that with revenues increased and position established, and the long oblivion of years fallen upon that "accident" which drove him here, with a heartbroken wife in a brain

fever, there was no reason in the world why *his* family should avoid their only equals, or refuse such society as the place could afford.

However, this relaxation of her husband's ideas did not, for various reasons, have very much effect upon Amy's life. In the first place, her timidity and reserve fully accounted for her entire disinclination to accept any invitations in her husband's absence. When *he* signified his pleasure of being present at any local dinner-party, Amy meekly put on her best gown and went with him. He had ceased to find fault with her; seeing little of her, finding always a well and gracefully regulated house, with no vulgarity or bustle in it, he was even kind to the poor little woman, whose comfort in life he and she had ruined between them; and if he compared her now and then—and could not help comparing her—with the women whom he sometimes met, and of whom he sometimes thought, with momentary impatience, that but for his own folly one of these might have been his wife, it was quite silently, only half consciously, and without the least outward expression; and she had a quiet popularity of her own among the people who knew her, and had come to be liked even by the rector's wife, who once pronounced her too good to interest anybody, and by the same Miss Lucy who had triumphed over that incautious sentiment.

But except on the rare occasions when Crawford, being at home, chose to accept a chance invitation, Amy's society was limited to the morning calls of the neighboring ladies, dutifully returned and patiently received. For, besides her husband's frequent absences, she had other reasons for the strict home-dwelling equally satisfactory. The poor little woman was, as they say in Scotland, "in her family," a very homely but expressive phrase. Her babies came quick and many, in rapid succession. A mother expectant, or a nursing mother, does better, both for herself and others, when she is not much visible in public; and there are many young women, early married, and soon overwhelmed with this happy but troublesome vocation, who would be none the worse in any sense for such a retirement during one ten years of their well-occupied *life*.

But that rapid succession of events which made nurse Patmore a most important personage in the Willesham cottage, and gave Mr. Fordham so many opportunities of probing the mind of his patient as to that "hallucination" which he was firmly persuaded still existed there, was not always productive even of such happiness as she could feel to poor Amy. Time after time the joy was turned into mourning. Again and again a lovely little waxen image, cold and white, was laid where the living babe should have lain, and there were days of watching and nights of anguish within those pleasant walls—days and nights in which the mother knew, but would not be persuaded, that her children must die.

The first of these dread experiences of life had taken Amy entirely by surprise. Her mind had been so fixed on her one violent and compulsory loss, that she had scarcely thought of the possibility of a loss which no one should be to blame for, and which, straining every thought, and laboring in every endeavor, she herself could but at last stand hopelessly by and submit to, but could not, had she been a thousand times Gerty, the strongest and least timid of women, have done anything in the world to prevent. This blow struck her down with a new and extraordinary pang, the strangest reversal of her old anguish, while a deep, hopeless, poignant renewal of it. Aprile was alive, somewhere in the world; God bless her, though far from the mother who should have cared for her. Aprile blossomed into youth, so she believed in the bottom of her sore heart; but Heaven help her desolation, this infant was dead! At first it benumbed the very heart in her with a dreadful involuntary thought which she had not strength to struggle against, but which her simplicity enveloped in no sophism, that God, too, was cruel, like man; that there was no longer any refuge anywhere; that when time and change and better fortune had made her husband merciful, the Supreme over all was no longer merciful, and that all her little ones were in His sovereign, uncontrollable, irresponsible hands.

The thought did not still Amy into submission, as it has done to many; it terrified her into a frantic passion of despair. She watched her remaining infants with a delirious, perpetual

anxiety, almost too much for her reason. She could have watched and guarded their beds, if it had been Crawford again who had formed his selfish plans of desertion. But God help her! what was *her* watching to that inscrutable, invisible Will, which, through every safeguard and protection, when it pleased and how it pleased, could loosen the most desperate embrace of love, and take the little ones away?

While she was groping through this insufferable darkness, the gentle Madge of Rookley came uninvited, and perhaps undesired, to the Willeham cottage; came alone and suddenly, with weeping in her mild eyes, and a world of consolations in her heart. She thought, the dear soul, that she knew what to say to the young mother, whose heart had broken over her first mysterious loss, and whose mother-anguish was thus again renewed: but when she reached Willeham and looked into Amy's face, Madge did better than speak. She forgot that she herself was a woman "professed" with a religious mission of comfort. She clasped her tender, clinging arms round the silent mourner and wept as though her tender heart would break, and prayed aloud a half-articulate petition out of the depths of her pious soul for the comfort which alone could reach this grief—comfort from the same Hand that had given the blow and had not *spared*! Poor Amy's religious endeavors had failed when she fainted in the Rookley chapel. This was another revelation to her! After awhile the tears, and the prayer, melted the chains of stone from her heart, and then that heart was very open to Madge's tender exhortations, that God, who had come so near to her as to take away her child; that God, so perilously and mysteriously close, who could take the others from the safe and guarded beds whence no cruelty of man could snatch them; that God, to whom Madge cried aloud in the intolerable ache and sympathy of her heart,—was not a God afar off to be sought in the mysterious gloom of chapels. The terrified mother, when she knew of it, fell down before the unseen throne which is everywhere near, with outcries of wild entreaty. She did not think of, she did not care for, Him unknown whom she addressed; she cared only for the children whose lives were in His absolute hand. Doubtless He

who knows the creatures he has made was more merciful to this troubled woman's personal, selfish agony, than human judgment would have been. Slowly in these years Amy came to know Him, who, from time to time, returned with a heavy hand to diminish her store; slowly and by sad degrees learned the lesson of her life; she, poor soul, who supposed her life's lessons all over in that one unbearable convulsion of her youth.

The time went quickly, despite its weary dragging intervals of sorrow, in these full years—full of birth and death, the grand primitive events and experience of that "life" which was so strangely different from the thing which her husband and his friends called life, and took pride in knowing.

Crawford himself was not unmoved by the loss of his children—once he was driven to an anxiety as desperate as Amy's first shock of terror, when little Edward shared the general danger of some epidemic disorder; but the boy recovered, and his father took heart despite the dropping of a tenderer blossom. Nor could Crawford feel more than a passing pang for whatever else might happen in the house, so long as Edward, radiant with health, rushed to meet him at the cottage door. He was gentle enough with his wife in her troubles, but he did not share them. He went on upon his prosperous way, making a steady parliamentary success, looking forward to office, and already a man of reputation; while Amy, bearing her children and losing her children, her sorrows multiplied to her in her blessings according to the woman's pristine fate, spent these eventful years of her early middle age in the Willeham cottage, alone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FIVE years after the visit to Rookley, it chanced that all the members of the Crawford family were again together, and this time in London. The Rookley household did not profess to come to town every year. Doubtless every member of the family contrived to have a glimpse of the glories of the season, to see the exhibitions, to hear an opera, to appear at two or three parties of country friends, the young ladies having for that purpose a ready chaperone always in Mrs. Maria; but as Gertrude had few fashionable aspirations, and Mr. Crawford himself could always "run up to town for a day or two" without much exertion, the expense of a house for the season had only been incurred once since the young ladies were old enough to be visible to the world. Then they had made their *début* as became their modest station; had been presented, and had seen a little of that corner of the great world, which country and family connexions made accessible to them.

At this lapse of time, Mr. Crawford had been moved to repeat that luxury, a step partly brought about by the secret agitation of Mrs. Maria, who, now that Gertrude was five-and-twenty, and without even a lover, much less a prospective settlement, thought that matters were looking rather serious, and that something must be done. Madge was impracticable, and beyond all the possibilities of match-making. Madge's curate, after the many and various changes of an unsettled mind, not half satisfied with its own creed, longing for natural and happy life, strong in the principle of self-sacrifice, yet sadly perplexed by the example of those Anglican apostles who had thrust *his* young thoughts farther than any of themselves meant to go, had gone off in a fit of impatience and dissatisfaction to Rome—to Rome literally, not figuratively—to Italy—to find out why it was that the rule of an infallible Church did not make that people happy, and what was the condition of the priesthood, amongst whose peaceful and obedient ranks he was almost ready to seek refuge from himself.

He had gone to Rome to make experiment, detailing his travels to the sister Magdalen at home, whose sweet letters followed him, full of pious confidences, the secret pure cogitations of her tender heart. He might return a Passionist monk, with bare feet and a hempen girdle; he might return a disenchanted Englishman, with the glamour out of his eyes; either way Madge attended the trial with unbounded faith in the lover, who was no lover, but only a brother in the faith, dearer than other brothers, and her chosen spiritual guide. However it might end, there was nothing in the way of match-making to be done for Madge, who, eight-and-twenty years old, gaining a little more confidence in her gentle self, had ripened into the sweetest clergyman's wife elect who ever took up that responsible profession.

Unconsciously she too had changed a little in her own views and thoughts. The Rookley chapel, which at first she had thought it "such a comfort!" to pray in, was now very seldom the scene of her private devotions. She used to find when she stole down softly in the early morning, at twilight to that little sanctuary, that there was always some one in her path to see and report the piety of Miss Madeline. However early she went, or however silently, though her gray figure would scarcely be seen in the faint light, or her noiseless footstep heard, there was constantly some prying eye which saw her turn the key in the great door, and go into the chapel, which now stood open all day long for whoever wished to use it. Poor Madge's tender, humble godliness revolted at this undesired publicity. She felt in her heart that this was very different from, "Enter into thy closet and shut thy door;" she was shocked and distressed beyond measure by the homely laudations of her devoutness, which even in the village came to her ears. She began to glide with secrecy and almost guilt, into the little church, then to find her own *prie Dieu* in her own room more satisfactory, and less agitating, and by this time Madge went no more to the chapel, except in company with the household; but, undisturbed by thoughts of observers, sought her Father, which was in secret, in that secrecy and privacy which He alone could see.

But things were very different with Gerty. Gerty was five-

and-twenty ; she had said a most decided nay to divers suitors, but there was no importunate lover now to swell her maiden train, or convince bystanders that it was no lack of other empires to conquer which kept her still the mistress of Rookley. And Mrs. Maria was troubled ; she had been older herself before her marriage, but then she was an heiress, an exceptional woman ; and when the old gentleman died, and Gerty's reign was over, what had that young lady to look to ?—nothing, a single lady's petty income, five thousand pounds ! True, Madge and she would probably live together, and put their maidenly revenues into one ; but what would become of Gertrude ? could she decline into an ordinary young lady, doing Berlin-wool work all day long, with two maids under her control, and a spinster's dinner to provide ? Mrs. Maria was seriously concerned, so she moved the elder Mr. Crawford secretly, by persuasions and arguments, which carefully veiled her real reason, to come to town for the season and take a house.

Here Amy and her children, then only three in number, one only baby having remained to her of the "bairn-time" of these five years, came to visit the head of the family. It was May weather, sunshiny and sweet—weather in which London is radiant, and when the most rural taste in the world may endure the big metropolis. Gerty, who had not the faintest idea of Mrs. Maria's anxiety on her behalf, or that the secret inducement which had brought the family here was to get herself "off"—Gerty enjoyed her holiday heartily. She renewed her wardrobe with womanful satisfaction, and entered into all the gaieties within reach with the full relish of a fresh mind. She was in the fullest bloom of her beauty, remarkable and remarked wherever she went ; even her brother Charles could spare time from his parliamentary duties to escort his handsome sister wherever she had a mind to go, and felt a certain increase of kindness towards his young supplanter, in the pride of preceiving the admiration which followed her. Her frank daring, still unsubdued by any fret or obstacle, was as brave and young in its sweet ignorance as ever. Her command and authority were undiminished : she swayed the London house as she swayed Rookley, was not disturbed in

her domestic rule by any amount of possible dissipation, and was perfectly ready, with all the disadvantages of a hired house and contracted accommodation, to have dined the Prime Minister or the Duke of Wellington, had such a hospitality been required of her, and entertained them to boot.

One morning she swept into the breakfast-room, where Amy had taken her place for the moment, later than usual. Mr. Crawford had one of his "attacks." All old gentlemen of Mr. Crawford's character have attacks of one sort or other. He was not ill—it was nothing to alarm any one—only one of his attacks. Gertrude had been with him since daybreak. When these attacks came on, the old gentleman, it appeared, was extremely fidgety about his affairs, and was ready to disturb the whole household or world, if it was necessary, for any trumpery unanswered letter which might happen to lie upon his conscience. Gertrude had been at such work since daybreak—writing for him, reading to him, settling such *minutiae* of affairs as, even under the best management, must from day to day accumulate, and were enough to vex the punctilious soul of the sick old man. Gertrude came in, perfectly fresh and fair, in her light morning toilette, with those wide sweeping skirts and flowing ribbons, which was not "the fashion" then as they are now, but which certainly became her admirably, though they had a girlish faculty now and then of sweeping down on her way a too light "occasional" chair, or rickety small table.

"There is nothing in the world to alarm one," she said, in answer to the inquiries of Crawford, who was there because his wife and family were there, as was becoming and proper. "Papa has one of his attacks; at such times, he always must have every troublesome little thing that he can think of discussed and settled. It is only his way; he will be well to-morrow."

"Had not I better send for the doctor?" said Crawford, rising in some anxiety, and going to the bell.

"The doctor saw him at seven o'clock this morning. I could not permit him to be disturbed earlier," said Gertrude, who was quietly eating her breakfast. "Papa has had his physic and his breakfast, and is gone to sleep. I suppose

he'll be up to dinner to-day ; there is nothing in the world to give any one the least alarm."

As Gertrude spoke, and Amy listened and looked at her with her usual affectionate admiration, a thought similar to that which made Mrs. Maria anxious came into the mind of this other very different sister-in-law. When her father died, as sometime the old man must, what would become of Gerty ? How would she manage to give up her habit of command, her large authority, and the conduct of all those affairs which she managed so completely, for the maidenly contracted home which she and her sister could set up together. The question puzzled Amy. It was impossible to conceive of Gerty out of Rookley—out of a great house, reduced to the extraordinary alternative of looking after herself and Madge, and their two maids. Oddly enough, Amy too thought of the two maids, and the woman's dinner, which neither of the two who were to eat it would care enough about to order : the idea did more than perplex, it troubled Amy. She could not realize Gerty to herself under such strangely changed circumstances ; but what else was there to look for ? for Gerty had long ago declared that she never would marry ; and Amy, always half-compassionate in her admiration for her beautiful young sister, had caught at the resolution with an unconscious reference to the origin of all her own troubles, and had concluded that perhaps, in this way, Gertrude *might* escape the pangs, and discouragements, and heart-breaks of "life." But Amy was troubled when she thought of the only other alternative. The maidenly little house, with Madge and the two maids ; how, under such circumstances, could Gerty live ?

Mrs. Maria came at midday to accompany them out. She was very full of a great conquest which Gerty had made the previous night ; for Gerty, although she was writing letters by her father's bedside, a little after daybreak of that May morning, had undergone a night of dissipation—just before had been at three or four parties and danced later than midnight. Long before that witching hour, her beauty had subdued the heart of one of the most unexceptionable men in London ; a man of wealth and fashion, with splendid expectations, who, in the course of time, could put a coronet on her

brow. Gerty took all Mrs. Maria's talk with the utmost coolness. She was too indifferent to make a pretence of being offended, for Gerty was not so deeply virtuous as to get upon a high horse whenever she was rallied about a lover, either possible or actual. She bore these annoyances with self-possession.

"You all know that I am not going to marry," she said; "for I don't suppose the duke will ever wish me."

Gerty thought it was just possible that she might have been moved to accept the duke.

"But, Gerty dear," said Amy, who had a little more confidence in herself as she grew older, and who sometimes now did originate something in a conversation among the women, and no longer confined herself to mere assent, "some time or other when you will have to leave Rookley—when there will be no great house to rule, nor estate to look after—dear Gerty, if you do not marry, what will you do?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear, a most sensible observation—the very thing I have thought a thousand times!" cried Mrs. Maria, in utter amazement at so unexpected an auxiliary, yet quick to take advantage of it. "I trust that will not be for ages; but you know you could not share your sceptre, you saucy despot. I should like to see *you* keeping house with Madge, and what sort of dinners you would give her! With a plain cook and a housemaid, Gerty, and a little boy all over buttons, and a little drawing-room where three chairs and a table would fall prostrate whenever you moved. I had rather see you in Huntford Castle, although there *would* be a risk of a countess-ship, and I should have to walk out of the room a long way after my lady. Gerty! Gerty! you born empress and tyrant, what should you do?"

Gerty had stopped a little, standing in the centre of the room, startled, when Amy spoke; growing red and growing pale, with a certain momentary dilation of her eyes and nostrils, and little gasp at her throat which that suggestion, gentle as it was, inferring her father's death and family changes so momentous, involuntarily brought. When Mrs. Maria added her concurrence, Gerty turned round upon her with a majestic look of defiance and disdain, the natural sentiment with which the father's house-ruler regarded the heir's wife.

Then that expression melted into a confusion of other emotions not easily decipherable. But she did not answer readily; she could not bear, with her quick youthful feelings, the discussion of anything which implied her father's death.

"I could always be matron at a hospital, or manage an asylum," she cried, at last, turning away abruptly out of the room with one quick sob not to be restrained of petulant displeasure and grief; and so went to watch in her father's room with a jealous apprehension, till she came to herself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GERTY came to herself before any great time had passed; her father was already much better, and had come out of the fidgety and querulous into the polite condition of his illness, when he thanked everybody for everything, and was so extremely scrupulous of giving trouble, that the woman left in charge of the house by the people who had let it, who happened to be a superior servant and person of discretion, and had been called in to assist in the sick room, declared it was a pleasure to be nigh him, and that the old gentleman was an angel when he was took bad, bless his soul! This same angelic mood, however, as it happened, was the only phase of temper ever exhibited by her father which Gerty could not bear. His politeness chafed her beyond all the extent of her patience, and as he was now much better she returned to her sister-in-law when she had cooled down a little, and had time to reflect that neither of them were to be suspected of any wish for Mr. Crawford's death, and that the idea, after all, was very natural. It took possession of her own mind with a comical pertinacity now that her anger was over. Madge and she alone in a single lady's tiny house, with a cook and a housemaid, and a boy in buttons! imagine what sort of a *carte* that would be which provided a spinster's dinner for Madge and Gerty! When she had quite recovered her first hasty pang, Gertrude

could not refuse to laugh at the suggestion; she went back to the other ladies in the little drawing-room with her brow cleared.

"I can always be a matron at a hospital, or manage an asylum," said Gertrude, marching in, and taking up the conversation, somewhat to the surprise of her companions and to the great amusement of one of them, exactly where she had left it; "but I should like to know what *you* mean, Mistress Amy, by asking me what I shall do if I do not marry? Maria *might* have said such a thing; but you, a soft, tender-hearted woman! Should one marry for an occupation? should one marry without being, as the novels say, in love?"

In this roundabout and not very elegant expression, Gertrude veiled the embarrassing question which young ladies, in novels, make no hesitation to ask very plainly, and discuss at full length, even with the young gentlemen who might be supposed to lend a certain additional awkwardness to the subject. "Do you suppose that I would marry a man whom I did not love," Gertrude meant to say; but she was shy of the word, as most young women are out of novels, spoken gravely and applied to themselves. Ordinary womankind, in common life, does not abound in discussions of *that* subject, so far as the present writer is aware, though it is wonderfully the fashion in story-books. Gertrude was not an ordinary woman in many things, but she *was* entirely one so far as their natural unconscious delicacies and charinesses of talk were concerned.

"I don't know," said Amy, timidly, and paused. To suppose that one should marry without being in love was a sadly heterodox proposition; it went against all that latent, innate belief in true love and human happiness, which lies in some corner in everybody's heart; but then Amy firmly believed herself to have been "in love" when *she* married, and no great good had come of it. She paused to see if anything better would occur to her, any clearer idea on the subject, or more happy expression, but after a while only shook her head a little, with a faint blush, and repeated: "I don't know——"

"I know, however," cried Gertrude, raising her noble young head, with a certain magnificent toss and shake like a

spirited horse; then she too paused, and Amy looked into her young sister's brilliant eyes—shining with all the confidence and proud defiance of evil, which nothing in Gertrude's lot had as yet occurred to shake—and into the face, which, flushed with the excitement of that thought, yet lifted its innocent, dauntless candor against all the deceits and all the miseries of the unknown world, and in her own silent heart wondered, with an ache of anxiety and compassion, whether perhaps it might be possible that this young undiscourageable soul could overcome life and the world.

"But I should have a vocation for the asylum; I should make a famous matron, I am certain," cried Gertrude, starting from her momentary pause of thought, and instantly sweeping off to see that all the arrangements for the evening were perfect before she should go out. So ended the conversation, but so did not end the thoughts which that conversation set in motion, and which were not so easily stopped.

Such accidents of talk are not unapt to happen before a fact that makes them memorable; such unconscious shadows very often herald the unforeseen event. There seems no evidence in the world that this talk could have anything to do with it, or influenced by the remotest chance what was to follow; but it is certain that on that night, Gertrude Crawford met her fate.

She went to it very unsuspectingly, not to say with extreme indifference and disdain of peril, certain that no creature in the world could move *her* beyond her own firm will and careless security of purpose. She went dressed, we had almost said magnificently, but the dress was not magnificent till the wearer had put it on, with flowers in her hair, and some old-fashioned diamond ornaments, which some old-lady relative had left her, and which Gertrude would not have reset. She was beautiful enough to bear that caprice, and the sparkles of trembling light in the old jewels became the young queen.

Thus she went under Mrs. Maria's proud guardianship through a very brilliant crowd containing some as great beauties, and many more illustrious names than her own. But the other beauties were well known, and Gertrude was new; the other beauties expected homage, and looked as if

they meant to receive it, while Gertrude's imperious frankness took admirers by surprise, and a certain fresh air and breath about her blew flattery away. Nobody knew what to make of this "young woman from the country," as some spiteful wit had called her. She was a little shy, yet perfectly undiscouraged in that brilliant company, enjoying her power and laughing at it in her innocent heart, enjoying everything as youth does, for Gerty was a girl still at five-and-twenty, with a pleasure which takes some additional gleam from everything, even from the lights and the flowers and the gaiety of the scene, but which is derived at first hand, and truly, from the young enjoyer's heart.

There was one individual standing by himself in a corner in that same company, a tall, straight man, without very much shape in him, in a dress which, without having anything remarkable about it, was unquestionably a clerical dress. He was silent, though his face did not seem to predicate that he had nothing to say; silent, however, he was, with that half-mortifying, half-embarrassing taciturnity which falls upon a man in a large party where he knows nobody, where all the people around him are in groups, and he stands alone among the voices and the laughter, a stranger in a crowd. We have said he was a straight man, with not much shape in him, but that might be because he was a student, and gave but small attention to his *physique*, for his frame was that of a Hercules. He glanced over the heads of the people about him with a half-smile upon his face: what can a man do when he is alone in a large party, and has nothing else to amuse him, but indulge in a little good-humored sarcasm, and smile at the other people who are enjoying themselves? This our friend was doing, finding out their little manœuvres as your half-disappointed spectator has the best chance to do, and laughing at them in his own mind, and at himself for laughing at them, with a good-tempered spite which had a great deal of humor in it. The amusement, we are grieved to say, was much and very suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Gertrude Crawford. He had never seen such a vision before. Other women as beautiful, more beautiful, might have crossed the student's firmament, but nobody so fair for him had ever

appeared in visible form before. He forgot all about the great part, and his own loneliness, his satire and his touch of mortification. He gazed at her, and her only, as if she had been the one figure in a desert.

"It is not because she is beautiful," he said to himself in an involuntary self-defence. It was not because she was beautiful; it was because—he could not tell why—because it was *she*. By and by somebody who knew him came to the silent man in the corner, and roused him with his hand upon his shoulder. This was a son of the house, who had belonged to the same college where Fielding won his double first and his fellowship, and whose fashionable mother had patronized Fielding during the few glorious weeks he spent in town in the first flush of his academic honors; though she scarcely knew him now, when other first-class men had obliterated the glory which was by this time several years old. His fashionable acquaintance, who had not forgotten him, and indeed had a hearty liking for his old comrade, roused him suddenly from his dream.

"Hallo, old fellow! What do you mean mooning here by yourself? What are you thinking of?" cried his friend, dragging him out of his corner. "Come along, and I'll introduce you to somebody—somebody who wants to know you—somebody whom you'll be pleased to know. Whom are you staring at? By Jove, it's the great Miss Crawford, the young woman from the country. Are you smitten too?"

"Crawford!" cried Fielding, assuming, or perhaps feeling, a sudden interest in the name. "Crawford!—and where does she come from, did you say?"

"Harvey—she has the bad taste not to appreciate Harvey—calls her 'the young woman from the country,'" said his friend. "Come along, she's a wonderfully pretty girl; but you don't mean to say that pretty girls are in *your* way?"

"I'd rather know this Miss Crawford, however," said Fielding, with a slight blush, "than your somebody who wants to know *me*. A young relative of mine married a man of the same name, very likely of the same family. If you'll introduce me, I'd be glad to inquire. We have never heard of my little cousin since."

"Oh, very probably Charley Crawford, the member for Fantwich. He made a——" "poor marriage," Fielding's friend was about to say, but checked himself with considerable confusion. "I mean, he's a fellow that's making his way; he's a rising man," he added, after a little pause.

"He made no great things of a marriage, you were going to say," said Fielding, very coolly; "nor did his wife, I apprehend; but it *is* the same, no doubt. I should like to talk to the young lady for ten minutes, if she won't think it much beneath her. Anybody, I suppose, under *your* roof, eh?—or your mother's rather—is good enough to pretend to speech of Miss Crawford. Come, I'd be glad of an introduction there."

Which his friend, rather abashed at the very plain interpretation of his own look conveyed in Fielding's last words, procured for him sulkily; and it was so, a few minutes after, that Gerty, all unfearing and unsuspecting, met her fate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Most likely she was not aware of it at the first glance, but she *was* aware that the grave person who now approached her had been looking at her for some time from his corner, and she returned the civility, or non-civility, as she curtsied to him now. He was not thirty, but he looked older than he was. He had a mass of hair not very smooth nor carefully attended to, which looked as if it had been light in his youth, and had darkened to a less sunny hue in involuntary agreement with his character and years. His eyes were blue, well-opened, honest, straight-forward eyes, but his face did not take therefrom that dangerous refinement and beauty, that shade of doubtfulness and treacherous expression, which belongs so often to the junction of blue eyes and dark hair. No doubt he had been ruddy, too, when he was a boy; but thought and toil had taken the color out of his cheeks. There was not,

in spite of the smile with which he had been regarding the people around him, the slightest shade of scorn in his face; his lip was not curled for that expression; it was slightly longer than it should have been, firm, but sweet, with humor in it, but no disdain. He did not even look proud; there was no defiance nor haughtiness in the way in which he held his head, though he was a poor man among the rich, and a man undistinguished by rank among the great. If he felt himself superior to these meretricious elevations, he was sufficiently superior to think it quite unnecessary to show it. As he stood before Gerty there was one thing perfectly visible and evident in the stranger's whole aspect—that he was full of power, capability, and intellect was likely—but it was certain that he stood there no reflection or shadow of any person or of any circumstances, but was at all times and in all places himself.

So Gerty thought, as she looked at him. Nobody else had ever impressed her with so distinct, and full, and living a personality; for there was nothing eccentric or peculiar about it: he looked like a full and perfect common man, somehow heightened, greatened, magnified; he was not an idiosyncrasy; and among the ordinary crowd, where idiosyncrasy is the only thing remarkable, the puzzle about this stranger to those who had eyes to see him was how his unpeculiarity and want of those angles of remarkableness which make people notable, made *him* the singular and extraordinary person in any crowd.

"A parson, only a parson," his friend explained apart to Mrs. Maria. "What is worse, a parson in London, in some region which geography knows not, and maps have left out, but might have been anything he pleased when he took his degree. A double first-class man—a wonderful orator; not a fellow I ever knew could beat him at anything. I know, of my own knowledge, that the greatest advantages were offered to him, if he had made a different choice of his profession; but Fielding always would, and always will, have his own way."

As this panegyric was ending, Fielding, having begun the first preliminaries of conversation, had gone straight to the heart of a subject, which not only interested himself in a high *degree*, but was likely to advance his acquaintance with the

young beauty. He made no guesses nor inquiries, nor conjectures, but broke into it at once.

"I think, Miss Crawford," he said, quietly, "that my little cousin Amy married a relative of yours."

"Amy!" cried Gertrude, with the utmost amazement, yet a certain flush of pleasure; "Amy! *our* Amy, my brother Charley's wife! do you mean that she is your cousin?"

"Yes, if she was Amy Fielding," said the stranger.

Gertrude made a little pause: she was ashamed to confess how ignorant she was on that subject; she looked quietly, intently, at him for a moment. He, catching her look, returned it with a certain frank inquiry in his eyes—what it meant—and a sudden smile. The smile was magical; it confused Gertrude with a strange impression that he had suddenly taken her into his confidence and opened to her his heart. Her eyes fell under it instinctively, and amidst the constant fluctuation of color which was peculiar to her, she became for one moment red to her hair. In the very climax of her blush, she spoke eagerly, to cover it, momentary and evanescent as it was.

"Ah, to be sure, she must be your cousin! I can see it in your face; you are as unlike Amy, as—as a feeble, dear little woman, always timid, and often sad, can be to a—a man," said Gertrude, inverting her comparison with a sudden reserve; "but yet there is just enough. Will you forgive me if I say, though I am sure I love her as much as my own sister, that I know no name for her but Amy? We did not see her till years after she was married, and I do not think I ever heard her name."

"It is very natural and simple," said Fielding, with the most perfect calmness, and with no aspect of mortification or affectation of candor; "she was not her husband's equal; but I do not understand such words as 'always timid, and often sad.'"

"Perhaps, that is not like what she seemed when she was a girl," said Gertrude, with a little eagerness.

"She was the happiest little creature that ever lived—a fearless, bright, soft-hearted little girl; no, perhaps not fearless; I want a word which bears a distinction," said Fielding.

looking at Gertrude, with a slight motion, and light on his lip, which was smiling, but certainly bore no affinity to the smile which had confused her before. He would not be so sorry for Amy, as he ought to have been, by reason of that other face.

"You mean not fearless like me," she said, quickly.

"I rather think I do," he answered; "she had nothing and nobody to be timid of, my poor little cousin. I might have called myself her brother without failing much of the truth; but we have never seen her, nor heard of her, since some few months after her marriage day."

Gertrude felt herself look guilty unconsciously, without quite knowing why; but she certainly had no share in that. She could not bear either that Amy, poor Amy, who was doubtless innocent, should be blamed.

"If it is so," she said, hurriedly, "it is most likely my brother's fault."

Then she stopped, recollecting with a strange wonder that she had never seen this man before, and knew nothing of him. Should she forsake her brother's cause, for a stranger of whom she knew absolutely nothing? But the thing was done.

"Very probably," said Fielding, with the same perfect composure. "I wish he had kept her happy, though. With her disposition it would not have been hard to do it, and it was worth any one's while."

"I did not mean to blame my brother; I have no reason to suppose his wife is not happy with him," said Gerty, with a little involuntary offence. "He might induce her to give up corresponding with her family, without being cruel to his wife."

"Nay," said Fielding, "life is hard enough without anything of man's doing. I do not blame her husband. She was happy because trouble had never touched her, poor simple soul! but that is no ground for supposing that she was able to endure it when it came. It would be strange if she could live ten years of common life without occasion for sadness. No, forgive me if I seemed to speak rudely. I did not blame your brother. I suppose a woman's happiness or unhappiness, like a man's, lies chiefly in her own power."

"Is a man's happiness always in his own power?" said Gertrude, quickly, half piqued into one of those semi-metaphysical discussions which have so much charm for young people, and full of a certain curiosity and half-malicious interest in the stranger. He was not "a nobody," he was worth putting one's self to a little trouble about. For the moment some feminine imp of mischief whispered to Gertrude that she herself, perhaps, might teach him better, and add to his experience of the things which were not in a man's power.

"I did not say always," he answered, with another look at her and smile, which seemed to convict her of her own thought. "There is nothing so common as to say that one human being has the vastest influence over others: I dare say it is almost in the copy-books by this time. My wonder is much greater to see how pertinacious self is; how uninfluenceable are the most of us; and how, blaming other people for it perpetually, we are always making our own fate, and many of us making our own misery—that is all; no, not always. I don't know how it is with ladies, but most men are fully convinced once in their life that their happiness lies, not in their own, but in some woman's hands."

"And you think most men very foolish for the thought?" said Gerty, with some petulance.

He did not answer, he only looked at her again with eyes which she could not reprove or abash—eyes as far from impertinent as any possibility could make them, which, nevertheless, sought seeking her face and *her* eyes with a certain pleasure and enjoyment in them, which was the strangest embarrassing compliment possible. Gerty was confounded, and did not know how to understand it. To himself there seemed a novelty of satisfaction in his gaze, a surprise of pleasure which was almost delight. He had managed to separate her for the moment from the people round her by that direct family question which established an immediate acquaintance, such as it was, between them—and looked so perfectly and honestly disposed to monopolize her by any practicable means, metaphysics or otherwise, that Gerty was somewhat bewildered. He was not rendering homage, "paying attention," doing anything that the other people

were doing. He was only seized with a sudden delight in finding her, as though she were somebody he had been looking *for*; and looked *at* her with a gladness in his eyes, which, for the first time, made Gertrude's head giddy with the strange intoxication of its flattery. King Alfred, or some primitive man of like mould and bigness, might have so recognized and made his first salutation to his queen.

This, of course, was not to be supposed practicable in such a company. The parson whom nobody knew—who was not even a dignified rector, but a mere London incumbent, a double-first of half a dozen years ago, forgotten of fame—was not to be permitted to keep possession of an acknowledged beauty, had they been cousins in their own persons, much less on the poor pretence of some mutual cousin to talk of. Gertrude and the stranger did not exchange another word until it was late and Mrs. Maria had made her first movement to go away. Then he approached once more.

"Will you tell Amy that her cousin Everard Fielding inquired for her, Miss Crawford, and sent her all the good wishes and regard that can go into a message?" he said, taking his place behind her as she moved to the door.

"No; for you must come and see Amy—she is at 3, Hertford-street. I will tell her," said Gertrude, quickly; "but come soon, because she does not stay long in town. It may be my brother's fault she has not written, but it would be mine if you did not see her now."

Fielding looked toward Mrs. Maria as if with some idea that she was the person from whom such an invitation ought to have come; but Mrs. Maria did not make so much of her interferences generally, as to be very ready with them; she looked grave enough, but said nothing, except a "good night, Mr. Fielding," as she pursued her way towards the door.

"I shall certainly come," he said, "and so good night."

"And so good night—what did he mean by that, I wonder?" thought Gertrude, as she drove home; "and so good night!"

There seemed to be some occult meaning in the expression. She was unusually silent during that midnight drive through the *dim* London streets. So was Mrs. Maria. The one was

thinking by fits and starts of her new acquaintance, with cogitations concerning Amy interjected between; the other deciding that she had better be as much as possible with Gerty for a few days till Mrs. Charles returned to Willesham, and that it would be very expedient to get up a few excursions, which would carry the young lady away from Hertford-street till the danger was over: but neither said anything to the other, as was to be expected, and they parted with scarcely the least discussion of the party, with some arrangement for to-morrow, to which Gertrude was extremely disinclined to assent, and with the gravest of "good nights."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"EVERARD FIELDING! oh, yes, it was very kind, very kind: but I should much, much rather you had said that I was very well and happy, and my love—you might have thought of that, Gerty!—you who are so ready and courageous, and always know what you are doing—if you had but said that I was happy and well, and my love!"

"I should have said so could I have supposed you would not wish to see him; of course he is a stranger, and nothing to me," said Gertrude, with lofty virtue.

Amy was in great and unexplainable distress: she wrung her poor, thin, white hands with a degree of fright and suffering not to be described. What was she afraid of? she could not have told any one. Perhaps not of her cousin: more likely of her youth which would come to visit her in that remembrancer, and of the past which his very name recalled to her page by page with the one spectre in its midst. Her sister-in-law watched her for a time with curiosity and half displeasure, then melted into a surprised compassion, and at last awoke out of the new thoughts which had for the time absorbed her, with all her old curiosity strong and fresh in her mind. Might not herein lie the explanation of what Charley had done to his wife?

"Why are you so anxious not to see your cousin? Is there anything frightful about you? it was not apparent to me," said Gertrude, shaking back her hair slightly from her face with that proud, graceful movement which shook off the tingle of a momentary blush as well.

"Why, why?" said Amy, vaguely. "Why? Ah, it is only when one is young one can always tell why," she added, after a little melancholy interval of silence, dreary enough on her part. Then she went to get her needlework; poor soul! it was the only resource she had: the children were out, Mr. Crawford had not yet left his room, and Madge was absent on some charitable duties. Gerty and Amy were alone together. If Everard came, Gerty only was near to hear his questions. That Gertrude and Everard might possibly have some interest in each other, did not occur to Amy. She only thought of the ghosts that would come with him, and how heavy under those honest eyes, which had not seen her since her youth, her unforgettable secret would lie upon her soul. So she betook herself in forlorn patience to her sewing. What must be, must be, to poor Amy; she could but bear it, when all was done.

As for Gertrude, she was a little restless that morning; her curiosity was largely roused; was not that quite enough to account for it? But she was vexed to-day when her full skirts and rapid motion swept down as usual that useless little "occasional" chair; she carried it off with her own hand, and set it in a corner like a naughty child. She was rather dissatisfied with her own appearance when she caught an occasional glimpse of herself in the mirror. She made furious obliterations with her pencil in Bechamel's *carte*, and drove that *artiste* half frantic with one wild suggestion she made, yet withal, despised the said *carte*, and her own office of correcting it, as she never had done before; perhaps she was thinking about the single lady's little dinner which she and Madge, when they lived together, might possibly indulge in; perhaps wondering what amount of *potage* and *ragoût* modified the mutton-chops in the new parsonages of red brick set down about such quarters as Spitalfields and Bethnal Green.

If Mr. Fielding had any share in this commotion of Gerty's

mind, it was extremely unphilosophical, and showed a great want of due consideration in that young lady's character, for it was by no means certain, nor indeed likely, that he would call to-day, and the distance which separates Bethnal Green from Hertford-street is no small matter to a busy man without either horse or carriage. Nevertheless, Gerty turned a deaf ear to Mrs. Maria, when she arrived to lunch, with the most delightful project for the afternoon. Amy had to stay at home to see her cousin if he came to-day, and Gertrude meant to bear Amy company. It might be very shocking to Maria's feelings, though she was sure she could not tell why; but Gertrude confessed demurely, that she was interested in Mr. Fielding; she had always liked clever people all her life; she knew this cousin of Amy's was a very remarkable person; she *knew*—yes, she had heard so, and she happened to have eyes and could judge for herself; she wanted very much to see him again. Mrs. Maria could make no reply to this confession; she went away in dismay, already seeing a second unfortunate marriage in the family. "For it is quite impossible to predict what Gerty might do," said Mrs. Maria, and it was hardly possible to console herself with a laugh at the freaks of young ladies who never meant to marry. She really wished to "settle" Gertrude brilliantly, "as she deserved," Mrs. Maria said, and she was vexed at this troublesome interloper, who came in the way so inopportunist. It made her almost ill-tempered, and in the solitude of her chamber she made sundry complimentary remarks to herself about Charley's wife.

While she was in the act of doing so, the expected visitor had arrived at Hertford-street. Amy and he stood looking at each other in mutual amaze when they met. They had parted boy and girl—he a lad just going to the university, she a very young, very pretty, shy little bride. Now he was almost at the perfection of his manhood, with the marks of toil upon him, and an experience ample and great, but not personal, sobering without saddening his face. *She* was bowed with something more than toil, and clouded over by an individual experience hard and killing. Things which he knew to happen daily in the world, and which it made him

grave and gray to think of, *had* happened to her and left footprints ineffaceable. Thus they met, who had parted at eighteen, for they were almost the same age, and such a meeting was strange to see.

Whatever he might think, however, he said nothing of his cousin's altered looks, nor of the long ten years that had made a gap between them, nor even of her neglect of her family. He saw the nervous timidity which oppressed her, and astonished though he was, and incomprehensible as it seemed to him, he did his best to reassure and comfort her. He was used to intercourse with suffering and with sinful people, and knew their ways better than Gerty did, as she sat watching with her bright, ignorant eyes. The thought which occurred to him was the truth, though he had no suspicion of the nature of it. What could Amy have to conceal? What was the secret thing which lay on her heart, and in her face? What was the mystery which she feared to have surprised from her or to be questioned about? He could not tell, and had no means of finding out, but he saw it was there. However, he spoke to her only of Woodcote—of his mother, and the changes that had befallen in the family—of his own education and successes, not vainly, but as a man speaks to his sister to please *her* with a reputation which does not matter very much to him—and of how, after a country curacy, he had got his district church and ten thousand people to look after.

Gertrude, to whom he did not address himself, sat by and listened to the homely story. It might not have been so homely if somebody else had told it; *he* seemed to seek the plainest words, and explained down into commonness everything that savored ever so little of the heroical, while Gerty listened sitting by. She was strangely moved somehow, this imperious young lady. She seemed to herself to know better, to see by intuition, the real tale which he put into so plain a dress, and which Amy received with so matter-of-fact a belief. To be sure he had no right to tell that history to her, or to suppose that the young beauty listened or cared for what he said. He told Amy with homely family allusions and smiles at the difficulties past, and laughing accounts of his academic

honors, which she comprehended not at all, but was pleased to hear of, as she would have been pleased to hear that he had a legacy left him, or a rich living ; while Gerty, behind, with a swelling heart and a heightened color, somehow proud of comprehending him, though he did not address her, heard and understood it all.

Mr. Fielding had a great deal of insight, and was more curious to know Gerty's thoughts than he had ever been before to penetrate into the secrets of either man or woman ; but he did not find out *that*. It was not given him to perceive that Gertrude followed his tale, adding to it with a lavish, heroical, youthful hand all the grander cadences which he had withdrawn ; he could not divine that his bald words were but suggestions to the imagination of Gerty ; that *she* guessed the struggle of ambition and faith, a momentary remembrance of which flushed his own cheek as he told his cousin of some hopes that had been held out to him, could he have decided to choose the bar rather than the pulpit ; nor how Gerty's whole heart swelled with defiance against all the world, as he said with a passing laugh that the great people had forgotten him now, and that other double-firsts had dismissed the poor parson into comfortable oblivion. All his great abilities and his knowledge of human nature did not whisper such a consolatory assurance into Everard Fielding's ear ; he would have received the idea with great scepticism, had anybody told him of it. He had very little conversation that morning with the beautiful Miss Crawford. He was a little compunctious about his boldness of the previous night, and shy to look at her now as he had done then ; the cause of this change being that he had no longer the delightful surprise and novelty of having found her to animate him, but that feelings more common in the beginning of such acquaintances diminished his courage ; that he was more respectful of her, more doubtful of himself, less absorbed with the immediate pleasure of having discovered such a woman ; that he had thought rather more about Gerty during the last twelve hours than was quite good for him ; and that he was only a poor parson and incumbent of St. Abraham's, Bethnal Green.

So there were few words passed between them that morn-

ing, and he was a little shy of asking if he might call once again before Amy went back to Willesham, a week later. When Amy had gone, there would be no excuse at all that he could see, and there would be an end of it; at least he *was* to come once again.

As for Gerty, she did not say a word to herself about the matter; was not confidential with her own heart, or her own thoughts, in the least degree; thought it just as well under present circumstances to dispense with thinking; told her father of Amy's clergyman cousin, who was very clever, and a double first-class man, and got an invitation to dinner for Everard before Charley's wife should leave Hertford-street. Charley's wife was rather a favorite now with the old gentleman; and, as Gerty thought it only a proper attention to the only one of Amy's relatives whom they had ever heard of, Mr. Crawford was not indisposed to think so too; so the pink message flashed from Hertford-street to Bethnal Green, and Gertrude's bold foot was caught a little faster in the meshes of her fate.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEFORE she saw her cousin Everard again, Amy had got over her instinctive dread of him, had ceased to feel that his honest truthful eyes must read her trouble in her face, and to tremble for that spectre of her youth which returned with him to afflict and scare her; but she did not look forward with pleasure to the day when her relative was to sit at the table of her husband's father and be complimented for her sake. It was no compliment to her, graciously as Mr. Crawford intended it, and much as the old gentleman expected Mrs. Charles to feel this mark of consideration for her feelings. Crawford himself was not much more pleased, though he, too, had to gulp the compliment to his wife. *He* certainly was not afraid of the parson cousin. To him Everard was only a youth in

the gap between school and college as he had seen him ten years ago. A double first, to be sure, called for a certain share of respect, and showed that the lad was clever and industrious; but Crawford was no more disposed to receive him on a footing of equality in respect of mind and experience, than he was to acknowledge an equality of rank between them. He said carelessly, "Oh, yes, he should be pleased enough to see Amy's cousin;" and, passing over him without further mention, desired to know who the other guests were to be. Nobody, not even Madge, who had not seen him, would suppose that the incumbent of St. Abraham's, Bethnal Green, was *the* guest of the evening, so Gertrude kept her sentiments on that subject within her own mind.

However, when Fielding made his appearance, "the family" were somewhat taken by surprise. There was, after all, only one other guest who was not a Crawford; and when Everard had once entered the room, his cousin's husband did not long continue to feel merely indifferent and careless of the new comer. There was much in him which Crawford did not understand, but there was something which a man of experience and of the world could not miss, and was obliged to perceive against his will. So far from being a mere student parson, of inferior rank to start with, whose passable acquaintance with the usages of society might almost be doubted, and for whom it was just possible his connections might have to blush, Crawford saw a personage with whom he unconsciously measured himself at the first glance, and whom he had no great confidence in concluding his inferior; one, moreover, to whom the easy patronizing manner he had intended to adopt was perfectly inapplicable, and whose powers he must acknowledge, to begin with, by changing his tone. This was by no means agreeable to the politician. He could have been kind to Amy's relation, if Amy's relation had been suitably inferior and beneath him, as he had comfortably concluded beforehand; but there was no time now, that being impracticable, to concoct any other mode of address than the simplest one which one gentleman is obliged to use to another. He almost felt the mortification of a defeat before "the parson" had opened his mouth.

Amy neither saw nor took pleasure in this silent triumph of her cousin; but what Amy failed to perceive, there was some one else fully ready and willing to note and exult in. It was natural that Fielding should turn to Gertrude as his first acquaintance in the family; but nature is perverse: the truth was that he did not turn to her; that the eyes that had rested on her face with such honest delight the first time they met were but seldom directed that way now; and that on the whole he seemed more disposed to address himself to the men of the family, to his cousin's husband, and former friend, especially, than to increase his knowledge of the ladies. For it was no longer the first surprise of meeting. Gertrude had intruded more and more into the thoughts, and disturbed more and more the occupations, of the Bethnal-Green incumbent, since his call in Hertford-street.

If he had been something more than a man, he would not have gone there to dine that day. Being merely human, and not without a lurking willingness to deceive himself in favor of his own inclinations, like the rest of us, he went, persuading himself that it was a necessary acknowledgment of their civility, and that he was by no means obliged to fall further under the influence of the young mistress of the house, because he once sat at her father's table. So it was only unconsciously, that he did address himself to Gertrude—unconsciously, with a reference far from flattering, rather than any common homage. When the conversation became general, and it happened to Mr. Fielding to disagree with the other individuals present—when his own views on a particular matter happened to overleap everybody else's, and to be received sceptically, and without understanding—then, without being aware of it, he turned to her—turned to her with a certain unspoken appeal and reference—"You know what I mean,"—to which Gertrude involuntarily responded with a heightened color and a brightened eye. If he had been at her elbow all the evening, trying to divine her thoughts, and to make her acquainted with his, he could not have done half so much to secure to himself the whole attention of Gerty. She seemed to herself to be the only person there who had the least glimpse of him—*what he was*. She threw the splendid interpretation of her

own fancy, roused for the first time to such a task, over the man, and his words, and his ways, and was moved as she never had been all her life before, by that unconscious claim made upon her from time to time, that she, at least, whoever mistook him, should comprehend what he meant.

"I can understand a man choosing the Church as a profession," said Crawford, who, having found himself, two or three times, no match for the stranger on general matters, had been at last piqued into attacking him in his own person,—“when the Church means a comfortable living, and a country gentleman's position; for after all, next to a squire of the old school, your rector, when the living is tolerable, is about the best specimen of the country gentleman now extant; but a man without influence or expectations—pardon me, my dear Everard—a man like yourself, for example, with nothing but a curacy before you, or, as it has turned out, a Bethnal-Green incumbency—why such a man should choose to be a parson exceeds my faculty of guessing. What tempted you to throw your abilities so entirely away?”

“The question is too big to be answered at once,” said Fielding, with a slight smile. “I am afraid you don't think highly of Bethnal Green or its incumbents. Suppose a man who likes authority, and enjoys ruling over his fellow-creatures—I am not sure that every German duchy exceeds the proportions of Bethnal Green.”

“Yet my son Charley is correct so far, don't you think? Oh, Mr. Fielding!” said the old gentleman, “a clergyman in the country holds a position at once dignified and peaceable; but there is—pardon me—or seems to be, a degree of—hum!—what shall we call it?—vulgarity in the regulation of parish matters in a town.”

“It is very true there is a great deal of vulgarity,” said Fielding: “penny subscriptions, for instance, and weekly visits, and tea and buns in the schoolroom, and a yearly excursion to Epping Forest, with all the Sunday-school teachers in great feather, and a couple of curates patronizing the old people who have forgotten what trees looked like. There is so much vulgarity in the details that I think it very happy for us that the Acts of the Apostles were written before the era of com-

mittees and subscription lists, and that Priscilla and Aquila were not Mr. and Mrs. Somebody who 'took a great interest' in the Church. What is sublime when it is a gaunt prophet bursting upon a city with a doom that everybody believes in, or an apostle with power to raise the dead and move the living, and Heaven's communication warm on his lips from Heaven itself, becomes sadly mixed with the ludicrous when it is a district propaganda of district visitors and Scripture readers; with good young men's societies, where the young men are such prigs as no university ever produced, and good little dressmakers and shopkeepers' daughters who teach classes in the Sunday-school. Vulgar! to be sure it is vulgar—as vulgar as a poor man's account-book, when all the sums are pennies and sixpences, and the very names of the purchases are mean; but then, everything is vulgar in detail. I suppose the *carte* of a Queen's dinner at Windsor," he said, stopping short, and checking himself suddenly with a laugh, "would be as vulgar, but for certain associations one has, as the Lord Mayor's lists of turtle and venison at Guildhall."

"That's true enough," said the other stranger present, who was an old parliamentarian and friend of Mr. Crawford; "but the Lord Mayor's dinners are not to be despised, as the city clergy know. A minister's speech at a Lord Mayor's dinner, especially if there's anything important going on in politics, matters a vast deal more to the country than anything that Lord John or Sir Robert might say in St. George's Hall."

"In spite of all the port-wine faces and bulges of white waistcoat," said Fielding; "and if it does not matter a vast deal more what a man says in Bethnal Green than in a pretty Tudor church, with a dignified household in the squire's pew, and a background of ruddy rustics—a scene one might make a picture of—at least it matters to a vast many more people; but I will not deny the little circle of smug faces, and the vulgarity of the detail."

"Very well, then, why choose that sort of thing?—does it bring you anything worth while? I don't suppose more than a hundred or two a year," said Crawford, carelessly.

It was "a family dinner;" there were no supporting pha

lanx of other guests to keep Everard from being bullied, if bullied he could be.

"Two hundred a year, and there are two curates; so I have forty," said Everard, not with either shame or ostentation, with a perfect simplicity which made it impossible to say anything more on the subject either of pity or wonder. However, this statement raised him a little in the estimation of Mrs. Maria, who listened with great attention, and very seriously watched Gertrude all the while, and who deduced from this speech the satisfactory conclusion, that, of course, he must have "something of his own."

"Then why the deuce do you stay there? Come! I understand all about the higher motives of young parsons; don't be affronted—you are waiting for preferment; but, my dear fellow," said Crawford, patronizingly, "unless your interest is extraordinary, you may remain there, I do not need to tell you, for a hundred years."

Fielding turned his eyes upon him with a little humor.

"What if I, too, were devoted to the social science?" he said, with a smile.

There was no air of superior penetration, or of having found out a piece of balancing humbug, either in the smile or the tone. There was a little laughter and fun in it, but no contempt; nevertheless, Crawford reddened suddenly, looked up with a sightly defiant glance, and answered, with some heat—

"The social science—oh! What do *you* call the social science? I suppose you've got some bath and washhouse business?—much need of it, doubtless, at Bethnal Green."

"Much need of it, Heaven knows!" said Everard. "What I call the social science is the science of teaching every man to help himself, and I judge for myself what seems the only means of bringing *that* about."

"Ah! I should say a very good definition," said the old Parliament man, who was a man of curiosity, and loved to hear what "the young fellows" had to say. "What do you suppose, now, *could* bring that about? It's not so easy as you young people think. I find it a vast deal easier to help myself, sir, than to get anybody else to help me; but that's the last thing you'll drive into the heads of the masses. I

believe, for my own part, we've overdone our charities. Hospitals for 'em, sir; asylums for 'em; refuges for their children. These workmen fellows are the only fellows in existence who can get through their lives without responsibility. Ah! depend upon it, you clergymen, with your charities and benevolences, are the last people in the world to teach them how to help themselves."

"For that very reason I detest benevolences and charities; I hate alms," cried Fielding, warming out of his usual quietness, and unconsciously turning his eyes from the horrified countenance of Madge, opposite to him, to the glowing and brilliant face of Gerty, who had followed the whole through innumerable dribblets of other talk, and saw his meaning, she could scarcely herself tell how. "Charity is the death of us. If I were in a country where primitive laws still existed, if I had such a chance as the Scotch Chalmers had, I could tell you better what was my idea of the social science, and why I chose to be a district incumbent in Bethnal Green!"

Crawford's lips were formed to say, "Pshaw! but could not—absolutely could not in mere physical impossibility. With a singular consciousness he looked up from his filberts at Amy's cousin, looked to see if his face would interpret this something in him which Crawford himself had enough of mind to perceive the existence of, but had not the heart or the insight to understand. To some people in the room, Fielding's face interpreted his soul; not to Mrs. Maria, who had just risen, and turned her head away with a serious air, and was certainly afraid of him; not to the horrified Madge, who passed him with a wistful look, hoping he was not quite so bad as his words; nor even to Mr. Crawford, who looked a certain grave old-gentlemanly disapproval; or his friend, who, with a "hum, hum," of startled and hesitating incomprehension, left that subject as soon as the ladies were fairly gone, with the idea that the young fellow had gone into transcendentalism and metaphysics, and began to talk of having heard the Scotch Chalmers once, and what a preacher he was. But there was one pair of eyes which had met Fielding's for an instant, meeting an involuntary question and appeal, and had answered, "Yes, I understand you," before their owner dis-

appeared at the door. Perhaps, after all, she did not quite understand him; perhaps her manner of the social science would have been to make the Bethnal-Green parsonage a great warm home for the homeless, and force her own arbitrary generous sentiments on everybody. The social science was quite new to Gerty, but she understood *him*.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE next day there were various comments made upon Amy's cousin, and even some compliments paid to her about him with an unintentional condescension. Mr. Crawford thought him "a spirited young man, very likely enough under present circumstances, and with the tendencies of the present age, to rise to a very respectable position in the Church; and I am sure, my dear Amy, a credit to any family," said the old gentleman, graciously. Joe concluded him to be "no end of a Quixote, but a famous fellow, with lots of stuff in him," while Crawford himself admitted that, "parson as he was, he looked like a fellow to succeed."

All which Gertrude eagerly listened to, with a thrill of pride, and a magnificent air of scorn, such as no provocation in the world could have brought to Everard's lip; but which Amy was very glad to come to an end of, and took very little pleasure in hearing. Amy had no desire to see her cousin a habitual visitor either at her father-in-law's house or her own. She was not afraid of him now for himself; but renewed acquaintance with him might bring overtures from Woodcote, and nothing in the world could induce Amy to bear the looks and questions of Everard's mother, the womanly motherly guardian of her own youth. She was glad to hasten her own departure, and go back to Willesham. Charles was not likely to pursue the acquaintance very warmly, and a man so occupied as Everard was not likely to visit her very often there.

But after Amy was gone, Everard found it somehow neces-

sary to continue his calls at Hertford-street, where Gerty and he, the first time, had a very interesting conversation about Amy. He could not help confessing that he found her very greatly changed.

"Who does not change between eighteen and eight-and-twenty?" he said. "Most likely she found the alteration in myself quite as great; yet she *was* so frank, so innocent, so joyous; it seems a change out of nature; I am not very inquisitive; I do not think she need have been alarmed for me."

"Do you think she was alarmed for you?" cried Gertrude. "Ah, perhaps, it was because she wanted to confide in you, perhaps she was embarrassed because I was there;" and Gertrude reddened deeply with a consciousness that she had stayed not merely "to support poor Amy," but with some consideration of herself as well.

"I do not think she had the least intention of confiding in me," said Everard. "At my first glance there seemed to me an uneasy consciousness in her eye of something to conceal, and fright about it. My poor little cousin! I fear she has taken a fright at life in some hour of trouble, but I do not think she would choose at any time to meet me alone. We used to be very good friends in our youth, but poor Amy seems afraid of me now."

"I should be afraid of you too, if I had anything to conceal," said Gerty, hastily.

He looked from the book he had been examining, with that quick sudden smile, quite distinct from common smiling, which Gertrude had never seen him address to anybody but herself.

"Why?" he said. But it was not quite easy to answer why. "I am sorry that I am so very unlikely to have the chance of making you afraid," said Fielding. "My cousin Amy was never like you. There are some natural impossibilities even in the way of wrong-doing,—that vocation which we all take to so kindly. I fear that the last sin *you* are likely to commit is that of concealing anything; but will you tell me what *you* are doing with this book of all books in the world?"

Gertrude glanced at it with a little blush, and falsified at

once her companion's words and her own, by an instant concealment, which, however, did not make her afraid of him. She pretended to lean across the table to look what it was, as if she did not know exactly what it was! and said something of somebody having brought an old volume up from the library, with a heightened color, and an air of having nothing to do with it. Perhaps she had not looked into the book? Fielding said. Oh, yes, Gertrude *had* looked into it, and found it rather interesting. It was one of a great many volumes of the Scotch Chalmers' works, perhaps the one least likely to attract a young lady's attention; and the Scotch Chalmers had been almost an unknown individual to Gerty till that chance allusion the other night.

However, Mr. Fielding called to inquire after Amy on various occasions after that. He redeemed his character with Madge, and made her acquainted with many phases hitherto unknown to her in the life of the poor, convincing her, at the same time, that when he declared his hatred to alms, "he meant something," as Madge expressed it,—a very faulty form of expression which, however, Gerty did not object to, as it happened. Madge somehow fell into a way of thinking how good it would be if *he* and Everard could haply meet together, though what were the results she looked for, or which of them she supposed most likely of influencing the other, Madge did not explain even to herself. However, it is certain that Mr. Fielding was very willing to give these young ladies all the insight they desired into his views of social science, and the means he thought most practicable for carrying them out. Only he was a little irregular in his instructions; sometimes he was absent as long as a fortnight, and reappeared looking not much like himself, but troubled and unsatisfactory; sometimes he found good and sufficient reason for calling twice in a week. He did what was more extraordinary than that—he who had given up society, and whom his great friends of the moment had forgotten—he managed to get himself invited to meet them at various places, and occupied himself with these fantastic businesses perhaps more than was quite consistent with his duties at Bethnal Green. It was not a very long time, after all, in which this would be possible; he could not

run down to Rookley, nor had the elders of the family, though always very polite and friendly, given him any reason to suppose that he would be invited. Perhaps he thought he might permit himself these two little months of folly. It was not a very long play-day for a life, and the chances are that he gave himself up to it at last, and no longer made exertions of self-denial and attempts to get off heartwhole, as he was disposed to do at the commencement of that acquaintance.

They thought he grew grave the longer they knew him; and Gerty, for her part, became a little jealous that she could not guess or find out the cause of his increased seriousness; for, at least on that point, Gerty did not understand Everard. She did not know how clearly *he* saw all the circumstances, and with what pathetic satisfaction he had resolved with himself, no longer able to pass it by, that then he should yield to his own heart and take his fool's paradise. He knew it was a fool's paradise all along; but he was young, and when he was there he forgot the evanescence of the joy. A hard-working life he had already lived up to this hour—a hard-working life, and one not without hopes and objects; and ambitions, which a girl's face or presence could not make an end of, lay before him. He had come to the one point in his way, where he wanted to linger to see how the flowers grew and the sun shone. He knew it was only a stretch of light across the road, and saw on the other side himself going on again, as solitary and as laborious as ever. But he was a man, and young, and he could not make a cautious *détour* to shun that one garden of delight. So he made up his mind to allow himself his holiday, knowing almost exactly where it must end, and when—but, under all the circumstances, it is not to be wondered at, if sometimes he took his pleasure sadly. This phase of Everard's mind, and all that belonged to it, was incomprehensible to Gerty—the only thing, she supposed, which passed in his thoughts when they were together which she did not know.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN things had gone on for some time in this way, when the season began to draw to a close, and the time to approach for the home-going of the Rookley family, Gertrude and Madge went for a day or two to visit their sister-in-law at Willesham. Amy was ailing, as she now was often, and it is not wonderful that Gerty, who was but too much disposed to give weight to everything that Everard said, should have remembered very clearly on this occasion his words about his cousin—that she had something to conceal! It seemed, as indeed was the usual effect which Fielding's opinions had upon Gerty, to throw a new light on the poor little woman who had already roused her own curiosity so often. Gerty watched her brother's wife with, as she thought, a new insight in her eyes; but Amy was not afraid of Gerty discovering her secret. That something to conceal did not tremble in her face under the gaze of her young sister-in-law, as it did at Everard Fielding's lightest look. Gerty could not see it, but she was not quite so secure and independent in her own sole judgment as she used to be; she did not see it, but she believed in it all the same.

Amy was ailing; her health had grown less strong in these years. What little courage she had before, had died out of her with the loss of her infants, and even the sight of her cousin had helped to shock her delicate frame and unstrung nerves. While Madge found her natural place with the invalid, Gertrude was left to herself a good deal, and did not much object to that, for she had enough to think of. They had but three days to remain at Willesham, but even three days, which it was quite impossible to suppose could be broken by one of those visits which occurred so often in Hertford-street, seemed to place the young lady singularly by herself and left her free to many thoughts. Of these thoughts Amy or this household formed but a small part; yet, when she had exhausted herself with dreams of other things, Gertrude's mind returned to her sister-in-law. What was the

cloud which had made that change which Everard found so unaccountable in his cousin? What was the something which Amy had to conceal?

Mr. Fordham was then making daily visits to the cottage, as he had only too often to do; and Mr. Fordham, though an old bachelor and a busy medical man, and gruff enough to the general world, was by no means averse to turn into the little drawing-room as he came downstairs, and take his chance of ten minutes' conversation with the beautiful sister of the member for Fantwich, whom the doctor thought a very high-bred and magnificent personage, as well as a great beauty. Mr. Fordham found that it interested Gertrude to talk to her of his patient, and having made this discovery, he was not slow to follow it out.

"Mrs. Crawford's strength is naturally not what it was when she came first to Willesham, great as were her sufferings then," he said in one of these conversations; "for she was very young, and her constitution had not been tried."

"What were her sufferings then?" asked Gertrude, quickly; "was she ill when she came here?"

"Ah," said the doctor, "you were not aware! I suppose the match was perhaps not exactly—nay, don't be afraid, I am no gossip. Yes, Miss Crawford, the day after they arrived at the Red Lion I was called in to your sister-in-law. The poor young soul had a sharp attack of brain-fever; a very long, violent attack. I feared we should hardly have saved her; but her youth, and such means as we were able to employ, happily pulled her through. Naturally the first loss is the most severe, and she was very young—a mere girl; but I must say, I have always blamed your brother's mistaken treatment of such a delicate creature; for, in her after losses, I have seen no evidence of the mind giving way, great as her grief has been. The circumstances were doubly melancholy, to be sure—so young—a nurse too—and with such cruel kindness to be dragged away!"

"I do not understand this at all," said Gertrude. "What was that cruel kindness? and the doubly melancholy circumstances? We knew nothing of my brother's marriage at that time; pray tell me what it was."

"I am not much given to gossip of this sort," said Mr. Fordham, with a slight blush over the indulgence; "nor making moralities either, for that matter; however, you shall hear, and I trust, my dear young lady, you don't need me to teach you how dangerous it always is to force nature. Your poor young sister lost her first baby somewhere abroad, and her husband, instead of giving her a little time to get accustomed to the thought, and to vent her first grief, hurried her away on the instant. They cannot have waited even for a funeral; the poor little thing must have been left immediately, from the condition in which I found the mother. The consequence was she had a brain-fever; the health of young mothers, especially when they are nurses, is not to be trifled with, and the result, strangely enough, is a settled hallucination in the poor lady's mind that your brother took her infant away."

"Took her infant away!" cried Gertrude, with a little gasp of amaze and horror.

"You, of course, are unacquainted with these phenomena of nature," said Mr. Fordham, "though they come not unfrequently under the observation of medical men in general practice like myself. Yes, I feel convinced she believes it to this day. If any one could get at the true conviction of her mind, I feel persuaded that she does not believe in the death of that infant; she thinks it has been hidden somewhere, stolen, spirited away, I am convinced of it. But there is always a strange secrecy in these delusions; I do not suppose she would confess it to any one to save her life. Ah, there is nothing so wonderful as the hallucinations which a certain state of the body creates in the mind. I have watched the poor lady narrowly, and I am sure when her next baby, that famous little fellow Edward, was born, she was more afraid of her husband than of anything else in the world."

"How very strange!" said Gertrude; but only because it was necessary to say something; the words had an unusual effect upon her.

Strange, yes, very strange; but it might be something more; she did not jump at the real facts of the case, as a mind so quick and peremptory might well have done, but she

was very much troubled by Mr. Fordham's communication. It seemed to mean something dangerous and miserable, she could not tell what; her mind, perhaps, was not sufficiently disengaged to follow out the inquiry; but something was certainly concealed under it. All that day Madge was upstairs with the invalid, for Amy was sufficiently unwell to keep her room. Gertrude, roving about below, having wayward fits of romping with the children, and capricious rambles by herself in the bright little garden, broke her own charmed reveries by sudden starts of inquiry. Could it be only as the doctor said? or did something mysterious and dismal lie under Amy's brain-fever and "hallucination?" She felt a little guilty in being able to dismiss this inquiry so easily. Sometimes for a moment it seemed momentous enough to occupy all her attention, but Gertrude had things to think of much more personal and engrossing. She had begun to feel herself less free to enter into other people's mysteries and difficulties; concerns of her own—of her very own—something more intimate and close than even Rookley, her father's estate, and her domestic management—had stolen upon her. She began to comprehend a little now what Amy meant when she asked, in the midst of all her young sister's occupation and importance, what would Gerty do when life came upon her? Life was coming, young and sweet, a new revelation; but Gerty did not ask herself what she would do.

Crawford came down late that evening to see his children and his wife—his children in the first place; for there was no make-up in the father's delight with which he kissed his little Edward, and kept the boy about him; but he showed no lack of attention either, to his wife, who found herself quite able to come down stairs next morning, and made herself well suddenly by a strange effort, as she always could manage to do when her husband was at home. Not because she was afraid of him—perhaps because his sympathy was too much for her—perhaps because she did not wish to awake any anxieties on his part—perhaps—it was not very easy on the whole to comprehend Amy.

In the forenoon of that day Gertrude and her brother were *in his little library* together; nobody with them but Edward,

now a boy of eight, and six-years-old Charley playing with a pile of books in a corner of the floor. The two elders of the party were not talking to each other. Gertrude was wandering about the bookshelves, trying, with a little restlessness and languor, to find some volume she should be sufficiently interested in to take out of its place. Crawford was writing. He was extremely civil now to his beautiful sister. Anything like jealousy of the place she had taken in the family had been long out of the question; and Gerty had it in her power to improve *his* connections and widen *his* influence, if she pleased, by a very brilliant match. So Crawford said something very civil from time to time as he went on with his writing, and did his best to make himself and his house agreeable to the young beauty. Thus they remained in the same apartment, with a very moderate amount of casual conversation, and long intervals of silence, till something chanced to come into Gerty's rash and daring head.

"I hear Amy was very ill, Charley, when you came first to Willesham," she said, sitting down near him. "Mr. Fordham is very forcible on the subject. He says you injured her by way of being very kind to her. I do not think that is a peculiarity of our family. Who made Mr. Fordham so perfectly acquainted, Charley, with the motive of your journey home? You did not mention it at Rookley, I am sure."

"Fordham is a fool!" said Crawford, abruptly. "What does *he* know about the motive of my journey? A gossiping old blockhead! I believe he does more mischief than good when he comes here. Is there no other subject of conversation possible, that he should entertain *you* with Amy's illnesses? Old humbug! I have twenty minds to send him away."

"Nay, it was natural enough; and he seemed very kind and sympathetic speaking of Amy's youth. Poor dear Amy! she must have looked a very young sufferer indeed, Charley," said Gertrude, "to be a mother breaking her heart over her child. Were you as fond of that poor little baby as you were of Edward? and is it really true that Amy has a hallucination, as Mr. Fordham says?"

"I tell you Fordham is an old fool!" said Crawford again,

growing red and angry in spite of himself. He had never been steadily questioned about the child before, and he found something quite intolerable in it, especially in this form—was he as fond of that poor little baby as of Edward? He felt the veins swell upon his forehead; he could hardly keep himself in becoming control.

"Amy is a delicate creature—always was—there is no stuff in her," he said, after a pause. "She can bear nothing. Good as she is in many respects, she wants blood. Gerty, trouble makes her helpless and troublesome; a very different effect it would have upon you."

"Yet Madge says she never saw such a nurse—poor Amy!" said Gerty, who was not diverted by the compliment. "Perhaps it is that illness, and the delusion in her mind, if she has one, which makes her—her cousin—think her so very much changed."

"Oh! her cousin thinks her very much changed, does he?" said Crawford, with a sudden burst of bitterness. "Perhaps she has been confiding to him the delusion in her mind? Ah! I heard from Maria before I left town the presumption of that parson: the fellow had better keep out of my way. A *mésalliance* in a man, look you, Gerty, is bad enough, as I have very good reason to know; but a *mésalliance* in a woman, by Jove, is intolerable! Nothing else can suffice in such a case but total cutting off, and I trust I shall never live to see our family disgraced by such a weakness."

"The women of our family, so far as I am aware," said Gertrude, raising her fine head with magnificent disdain, though her face flushed deeply, "have chosen to think for themselves on that subject; but I do not see what that, or anything about Mr. Fielding, which Maria or any other ignorant person may have thought proper to tell you, can possibly have to do with my question about your wife."

"By Jove, I see it through!" cried Crawford, betrayed by his passion and guilt to a point far beyond his intentions. "I can perceive your drift, cunningly as you veil it. You want to fix something dishonorable upon me by dint of the doctor's gossip, and my wife's vapors. You mean to try, because *your flatterers* say he likes you, to supplant me with my uncle

Molyneux, and provide for your beggarly lover; but, by Heaven, I see your drift! And I warn you, Gerty, there is no woman in the family, or out of it, who shall overreach *me*."

Gertrude had risen up and stood fronting him, perfectly pale, perfectly contemptuous in the full splendor of her beauty, and that superiority which his causeless passion and injustice gave her.

"It would be a poor adversary who could try," she said scornfully, though with a heave of her breast and flash of her eye, "seeing how entirely you overreach yourself. Anything dishonorable I have never until now connected with any man of our family. I had been proud enough to suppose it impossible; but you are my elder brother, and a man of experience: there can be no doubt that you know best."

So saying she went out of the room, with her most majestic step, sweeping forth with a splendor of scornful action, which confounded Crawford. She had not made the slightest attempt to clear herself from his accusation; but, if he believed it, had left him to its full enjoyment. He called after her, somewhat shocked and startled at his own momentary self-betrayal, but Gertrude did not take the slightest notice. She was deeply affronted, not so much with his insinuation about uncle Molyneux, which seemed to her only an insane suggestion of passion, but with his bitter attack upon her lover—her lover! The word dwelt in her mind, heightened her color, and brought the water to her eyes. Was that Everard Fielding? Perhaps the idea, though she shrank from it, made her lofty head higher than ever, and quickened the swell of pride and defiance in her heart.

When she was gone, Crawford sat down again, by no means pleased with himself, and bitterly angry with his sister. Then he perceived for the first time the alarmed face of his favorite boy, who stood by the table, with a quiver in his lip, and a cloud on his brow. Edward was not a prodigy, nor very clever, but he was high-spirited and affectionate, and knew the meanings of some words acutely enough. He was deeply attached to the father who made him so visibly his

favorite, but he was fond of his aunt Gerty notwithstanding, and a stout little champion of mamma. To hear them all finding fault with each other was astounding to Edward, and the "something dishonorable" went to the boy's heart.

"Papa!" he said, with a certain breathless eagerness, "does aunt Gerty mean that *you* are dishonorable? It is a wicked lie if she does! or what is it all about?"

"Aunt Gerty does not know what it is all about," said the father, with a sigh—an unexplainable sigh, half of relief, and half of a sharper pang than Crawford had felt before, during all his life.

"But you do? Papa! does any one dare to say *that* of you?" asked Edward, with his excited face.

"Go to play, my boy," cried Crawford, with a voice of momentary anguish. "No, no, no; no one says so, Edward; it was a word spoken in haste."

Whether Edward was satisfied or not, he saw that nothing more was to be said on the subject. He went to his play as he was told, but from time to time Crawford saw—and trembled—the boy's head turned from his amusement, and the anxious observation that filled his face. It was clear that this word which Edward had heard, hitherto only as the climax of disgrace and misfortune, had taken hold of his memory—dishonorable! Crawford had suffered transient twinges of conscience before this moment, and many fits of terror, but now his punishment began in earnest. All the world arrayed against him could not have gone to his heart like the look of that child's face.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THAT same evening Gertrude insisted suddenly upon returning to town. She would give no reason but caprice to Amy, who was a good deal troubled about the sudden resolution. Charles had come down on purpose, and meant to have escorted his sisters back again to Hertford-street; why should their plans be changed? and somebody was coming to dinner, somebody important enough to be asked to meet the young ladies, but not so important that Charles would willingly exert himself to amuse them for the evening. Amy had a nervous woman's terror of gossip about her own household; she was afraid of people saying how careless the rising politician was of his guests, and how indifferent to people whom he saw in his own house. She cared for appearances now in the clouded noon of her life, when better things were scant with her; she came out of her usual passiveness altogether when she heard of Gertrude's resolution, and entreated her to stay.

Gertrude, who was not at all prepared for these solicitations, and whose own pride began to remonstrate against suffering herself to be influenced in her movements by the conversation which had just passed, yielded after a little resistance. To give in to Charley, or permit him to suppose that after what had passed she was afraid to meet him, was the last thing in the world to satisfy Gertrude. She did not even mention it to Madge, who was sufficiently anxious to know what had induced her sister to think of a sudden retreat from Willesham. Had she heard anything? had it been "impressed on her mind" that anything had happened, or that she ought to return? But no mysterious "impressions" had reached Gerty's mind, and she would not condescend to say that she had been affronted and insulted, and would come here no more. So she went out with the recovered Amy to make some calls, which the poor little woman thought it her duty to attend to as soon as she was able, and through which Ger-

trude passed with a loftiness and pre-occupation which rather added to the respect which everybody felt for the great beauty, whom the Willesham ladies were inclined to believe in as an exalted personage, and whose likelihood of making a very great match had reached Willesham by means of the servants, and produced a due effect there.

Nobody would have supposed that the special thrill of pride which elevated her head was inspired by no greater thought than that of a hard-working parson, living upon his college fellowship, and spending his days in the new red-brick parsonage of St. Abraham's Bethnal Green. Even her brother, whose taunt had done it, did not form the slightest conception of Gertrude's state of mind. He himself, even when he fancied himself most in love with his pretty little bride, had never been otherwise than a little, a very little, ashamed of the whole proceeding. Gertrude, over whose head the Willesham ladies saw hovering the shadow of a coronet, and whose loftiness of manner, which, however, was not personal haughtiness, nor of that kind which affronts the pride of other people, they excused on account of her great prospects, went through those garden-paths and into those pretty country houses with a thrill in her heart like a chime of music, to which her step unconsciously kept majestic time, all produced by the flush of sudden insight into her own thoughts and heart, with which she had heard Everard Fielding called her lover. Her lover! She was doubtful of the fact, as, spite of all the penetration attributed to them in such matters, women always are when their own hearts are concerned; but she could not deny herself the involuntary elation that came to her at the thought.

And when Crawford and his sister met, even before dinner, when there were no strangers present to induce a proper amount of family dissimulation, neither Amy nor Madge guessed that there had been any quarrel between them: Crawford was rather more polite than usual, if that was possible; Gertrude still somewhat more lofty, but that was the whole. The guests who joined them at dinner had no suspicion that it was anything but a happy and affectionate family party which their presence enlarged. The evening

passed without any jar or uncomfortable accident. The family separated with the usual good-nights. Then the member of Parliament returned to his library without much comfort in his thoughts. Experienced man of the world as he was, he knew no more how to judge that young woman of five-and-twenty, his own sister, than if she had belonged to a different species. He sat late into the summer night, accusing himself for his own folly, imagining how she upstairs in her own apartment was thinking over the whole matter, confiding it to Madge, gleaning what she could from Madge's better acquaintance with Amy, and laying all the circumstances together. Mr. Fordham's medical gossip, Everard's report of the great change which was so apparent in his cousin, and his own unwise and unnecessary passion,—Crawford felt that there was little doubt of these subjects occupying Gertrude's active and curious mind to the exclusion of all others. He did not believe in his own unguarded intimation, that she wished to injure him with uncle Molyneux; but while he imagined his sister, rapid, arbitrary, and accustomed to jump at conclusions as she was, set full upon the track of his own secret, with so many indications to guide her, he could not but recall with a certain chill and shiver those chance words of his brother Joe, which at the time struck him so unpleasantly: "Nothing less than the discovery of some dishonorable action would induce uncle Molyneux to disown the man who had been educated as his heir." Little as honest Joe had meant by these words, they had found a place in Crawford's memory, and now returned to torment him. For the first time for years it occurred to him, that all his prosperity, all his reputation, the comfort and almost wealth in which he lived, his distinguished associates, his brilliant prospects, were hung upon the merest thread: an accident, the commonest chance, might reveal that one passage of his life which was unforgiveable and beyond redemption. Gertrude in the room above him might be pursuing the clue which would lead her to it now. He had lived at ease and forgotten his guiltiness for five prosperous years, but now once more his sin had found him out.

And Gertrude *was* awake and thinking, as her brother had

supposed. The night was very warm, and she could not sleep, she explained to herself. She was sitting in the moonlight in her white dressing-gown, with her hair about her shoulders, sometimes even with her hand over those eyes which did not care to look at the moon or anything else; but not a thought of Charley disturbed his sister's mind. She was no longer inquiring within herself whether Mr. Fordham's communication had any meaning more subtle than the fact, or wondering what Amy had to conceal. She was not thinking at all, perhaps; the word was a misnomer; she was only lost in a reverie of probabilities and chances, which skimmed and darted like so many birds about the unconscious head of that poor parson in Bethnal Green.

The next morning Crawford, according to the original arrangement, took his sisters back to Hertford-street, and heard with no small satisfaction that Mr. Crawford was anxious to leave town a week earlier than he had intended; but still nothing beyond the merest civilities passed between himself and his younger sister. Gertrude had bethought herself this morning of his extraordinary suggestion that she wished to injure him with uncle Molyneux, and tardy indignation had come to the aid of her disdain. Why should she injure him?—how could she injure him? Whatever Charley might have done to his wife, whatever had been the fate of that mysterious child, it was their concern and not Gertrude's. Besides that, real guilt on the part of her brother never entered into her calculations: she could suppose him cruel, unkind, heartless; she *did* suppose that very likely poor Amy had found him so; but absolute dishonor was something beyond the reach of Gertrude's imagination. If the real story had been told to her, it would most likely have been received in the first instance with total incredulity; but a troubled conscience cannot stop to estimate character or conclude what the person whom it fears is likely or not likely to conceive.

Crawford did not know what to make of his sister's cold "Good morning;" whether it was a passively hostile declaration, or the first note of warfare; whether she was still only groping among suspicions, or had found anything out. How-

ever, *he* had to make the best of it under any circumstances; he was very attentive to the old gentleman, with an unconscious sentiment that his father at least would not desert him; and very assiduous in his devotion to the business of the House, when he got there, not without a thought of the same kind. The session was lagging to its conclusion in blazing August weather, which no half-interested politician could stand, though the important 12th had not yet arrived. *He* was at his post, whoever failed; but he had taken up his burden once more, and henceforward the bonds of that heaviness were not to be loosened from his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LEAVING London a week sooner than they had intended, left the Rookley family but a few days more in town. Joe and Mrs. Maria—the latter with great reluctance, for she was very doubtful of Gerty's "intentions;" the word having been transferred to the lady in this case, no doubt being entertained by Mrs. Maria, at least, that Everard's intentions were distinct enough, and that both love and interest combined in his suit—had already left; and Gertrude made no opposition to her father's wish. It was true it would deprive her of some of those visits which had become only too important to her happiness, but perhaps it might hasten the decision of that other question, whether or not Everard Fielding made any pretension to that character of lover, by the very mention of which her brother had electrified Gertrude: her preparations for the return home were not, however, made with very great alacrity. Life had arrived to herself, and detached her from the common interest. Rookley was no longer the first place in the world to the young woman, who had hitherto ruled and governed that house.

On the second day Everard came: he met Madge in the street, on his way to the house, and learned from her how

soon, how very soon, they were going. So great a cloud came over his face at the news, that gentle Madge gave up her intention of returning for propriety's sake, lest Gertrude should be left alone with him.

"If he is fond of Gerty, he had better tell her so; it will do him good," said Madge to herself, with a sigh, as she went upon her charitable way. She knew her own curate had eased his heart by telling herself so, though it had not done them much good; and Madge, like other people, thought a great deal of her sister's pride and love of command. *She* thought it quite impossible that Gerty could "be fond of" the incumbent of St. Abraham's. She glanced after him, as he went his way with the rapid agitated step of a man who had taken a sudden resolution, who sees nothing but the one thing which he is going to do, and gave him a sigh and a "poor Mr. Fielding!" Nothing could be done for him; it was better that he should have it out, and relieve his heart, "and tell her so: it would do him good."

With something of a similar feeling, Everard himself went upstairs to the Hertford-street drawing-room. It was very near over now, this enchanted holiday; the farther gate of his fool's paradise stood open before him, and it is not to be denied that the way beyond, solitary and austere as it was, looked gloomy enough to his eyes. He went into the drawing-room with that cloud upon his face. Gertrude, perhaps, had as much of a woman's penetration as most other women, and it was not for want of thinking what he would do, and what he would say when he came on that last visit, that she started up so suddenly, when she saw him, first asking,—

"Mr. Fielding, what has happened?"

She thought he was ill, or that some calamity had befallen him; she did not think for this moment either of herself, or of how he would feel to hear that they were going away.

"Nothing has happened," he said, calmly enough in appearance; "but that I have just heard from your sister how soon you are to go away."

Gertrude stood still as she had risen, looking at him anxiously; *she* was a little beyond the ordinary instincts of polite-

ness and common rules of behavior at that moment; she did not ask him to sit down, she remained unconsciously standing opposite to him, with her hand trembling upon the back of a chair.

"Miss Crawford," he said, after a little pause, "I think when a man loves a woman, though he may have no right to address her, he has a right to tell her so."

Gertrude did not say a word, did not even blush, rather grew paler, at an address so unlike those declarations which she had heard before, and which perhaps she had expected now.

"I stand only upon that," said Fielding, with a slightly tremulous voice. "I have no right to address you, but you must hear once and for ever what is in my heart. It has not come upon me blindly, Heaven knows! I have seen what I have been doing; I do not tell you in the shock of a sudden discovery, or because I entertain unlikely hopes, and I do not wish to distress or agitate you either with the sight of my pain; but a man who loves a woman with all his heart, as I do, is no man if he does not tell her so. Forgive me if I am abrupt and startle you; there will need but few words to say what I have to say."

He made a slight pause, more to take breath than as looking for any answer; but Gertrude interrupted him. She spoke very low, and with a little breathless gasp, but steadily,—

"Why have you no right to address me?"

What protestation he might have been about to make, or in what words Everard Fielding would have put his love-tale, after such a preamble, was not now to be ascertained; he turned from that hastily, with perhaps a momentary disappointment that she did not hear him out.

"Because my profession is not one which permits ambition," he said, with a flash of his eye and a quiver of his lip. "Were I a soldier, or a lawyer, or a merchant, I might have courage to ask, and boldness to believe that I could win you still. I should not fear to gain a place which I could offer even to you," he said, with growing excitement; "but I have entered a service which cannot be held for hire or reward. I should despise myself, you would despise me, if I used my priest's

office only as a ladder, to bring me to your level; I have thrust myself out of the lists, therefore I can only say now, God bless you, farewell."

Gertrude did not take the hand held out to her; she did not see his face, moved beyond telling with extreme emotion. She was deeply disappointed, amazed, touched to the heart. She was not the kind of woman who could end such a scene with a miserable self-restraint and failure, or could leave it in all the mists of misunderstanding and mutual self-sacrifice. She was too honest of herself to take him at his word. With her eyes full of tears, she still remained for a moment fronting him.

"If you will not ask anything of me," said Gertrude, with a certain touch of petulance in the pathos of her voice, "I cannot make you do so; and if you have made up your mind, there is nothing to be said indeed, as you tell me, but—good-bye."

With which words Gertrude dropped into the nearest chair, and put up an agitated, hasty hand to her eyes; there was nothing for her to do, it appeared, nothing to be said further, only to be miserable. Very well! there should be no cheat at least, and she could bear it as well as he.

But that was not exactly such an address as is most calculated to send a man away. He drew a little nearer to her involuntarily.

"Do not try me beyond my strength," he cried. "I shall have enough to bear, Heaven knows. It is easier to endure these agonies in imagination than in reality. I have come to say farewell to you, Gertrude; to bid God bless you, and never to look upon you more—you, who are more than all the world to me. I have looked forward to it, but I did not know how bitter it was. Yes; I have seen it, week after week, coming nearer, this end of my fool's paradise. A little more and it will be harder—harder!—too hard for any man to bear!"

"You have known it all the time and looked forward to it?" said Gertrude, raising her head with a flush of indignation; "and did you never think all that time what it might be to me?"

The question utterly confounded Everard Fielding. That sudden javelin pierced through all his defences at a stroke. He gave a strange cry, almost like a woman's cry, in his downfall and overthrow. The next moment he was *not* standing in solemn anguish before the lady of his love; and whatever there was of originality in this interview ended with these words of Gertrude. The ground was taken from beneath his feet and he had not another word to say—not another word after his previous fashion. The scene ended sadly like a common love-scene, as might have befallen the smallest or the greatest people in the world. It lost its pathos and its dignity, and one of the individuals even displayed a degree of triumph not to be defended on any elevated grounds. It is to be supposed, however, that Mr. Fielding did not object to that; it does not always hurt a man's pride to be triumphed over. He *was* vanquished, conquered, overcome; and why should not the victor mount her car?

When Madge returned an hour and a half after, Mr. Fielding was still in Hertford-street. When she entered the drawing-room, much surprised and a little timid, for Madge had not supposed that he would dally long over that last interview, a little reintroduction took place, which frightened Madge half out of her wits. Gerty was "in love" with the Bethnal-Green incumbent as sincerely as the Bethnal-Green incumbent was "in love" with Gerty; the two meant seriously to marry each other when that should be practicable. What would Mr. Crawford, what would everybody, say? The thought took the breath from Madge's gentle bosom. She was very glad to see her sister happy, and she liked Everard; but how in the world could they find courage enough to face all those wild beasts of difficulty before them? What could they do? Gerty, however, did not share in Madge's gasp of anxiety and terror; and as for Everard, *his* time of triumph appeared about beginning; he was as little afraid of Mr. Crawford, or of the forty pounds a-year which remained to him of his living after paying the curates, as he would have been of a bishopric, had that fallen prematurely upon his shoulders. He knew no more what they should do than he knew how to weave ribbons; but he knew Gerty, which was

infinitely more to the purpose; and the two of them, on that wonderful platform of acquaintance with each other, looked forth into the world and the future with an equal courage and without the shadow of a fear in their honest eyes.

CHAPTER XL.

THIS astounding intelligence made all the commotion which was to be expected in the family. Joe, impelled by Mrs. Maria, came up to town instantly, to do what he could "to put a stop to it." To put a step to it! as if either of the two culprits were not abundantly able to overcome Joe! How Mr. Crawford received the news it was impossible to say: he met Joe full of restrained rage and disappointment; but he said nothing of putting a stop to it; even seemed to stand a little in awe of "that fellow of a parson," and had no inclination to storm at him, as his son was inclined to do. Probably the old gentleman had seen enough of Mr. Fielding in the one serious interview which Everard would not postpone even at Gertrude's entreaty, to cure him of any inclination to vituperate. The old man took refuge in the stronghold of age.

"They say nothing about marrying in the meantime," said Mr. Crawford; "they can see *that* is impracticable, at least. Gerty is not in her first youth, to be sure; but still, so handsome as she is, she can afford a year or two: let us keep very quiet about it, my dear boy. Don't let it be known to anybody out of the family; a year or so will tire them out, take my word for it; they'll quarrel, and misunderstandings will arise; they always do in long engagements, and Gerty's ambition can be worked upon in the meantime. A girl of her spirit!—suppose Gerty made into a parson's dowdy wife, living upon a few hundreds a year in a six or seven roomed house at Bethnal Green! the thing is incredible! I cannot persuade myself to attach any importance to it. Fair and softly go far; let us give her a little time."

"And Huntford," said Joe; "Maria is crazy about Huntford; he who has that castle down in Warwickshire, and is Lord Leamington's heir. Maria says the very slightest encouragement—and the fellow is as rich as a Jew, and has a deal more brains than he has any right to under such circumstances—would have brought him to Gertrude's feet."

"Gerty has refused Mr. Huntford," said the old gentleman, with quiet despair. "However, there are more men in the world than he; and, besides, we cannot help ourselves; we must have patience, and wait."

"But Gertrude is five-and-twenty!" said poor Joe, who had been primed by Mrs. Maria.

Mr. Crawford only shrugged his shoulders in silent helplessness. What could anybody do? The last thing practicable was any attempt to coerce Gerty. The idea was manifestly as foolish as it was unlikely of success. Gerty was five-and-twenty; no one could say she was too young to decide for herself in a matter which concerned so closely her own happiness, and no one could say she was incapable of making that decision. Unless the wary plan of waiting the issues of a long engagement, that cold-blooded policy of age, should happen to succeed, Mr. Crawford was at his wit's-end how to stop Gerty. She might have married the incumbent of St. Abraham's while he stood by in bewilderment, thinking what possible means could be taken to prevent her. The old man was helpless before his household governor and despot: he could think of her suffering and yielding to the complicated aggravations of a long engagement—these sufferings do not count for much, at least in anticipation, to people who themselves stand at the close of a full and eventful life—but he could not take any harsh immediate measures now to stay the proceedings of his favorite child.

Doubtless the old gentleman concluded that this marrying of sons and daughters was a troublesome business, and that he would gladly be done with it. Of his daughters, Mary only had married satisfactorily; and her Scotch baronet, though a great man in his own district, preferred remaining there, and had no ambition to make any figure in the world. Emily had followed her husband to India, where he who had

been but a briefless barrister at home was now a judge, and flourishing; but an Indian judgeship was no great thing for a Crawford of Rookley. As for Madge, the chances were that she would never marry; as for Charley, he, it is true, was a great deal better off than he deserved to be, and had got over his troubles; but Mr. Crawford felt a momentary bitterness even in thinking of poor little Amy, as he remembered that this parson was her cousin; and here was Gerty, the apple of his eye, the handsomest girl in England! must she, too, be permitted to throw herself away? The old gentleman sat groaning over his newspaper in the contracted library of his London house, with the August sun blazing in the windows, every tree within reach baked brown between heat and dust, and odors which were not Elysian aggravating the almost tropic noon of London. This unfortunate occurrence had even delayed by a couple of days the return to Rookley. But what was to be done when one had such people as Gerty to deal with? Nothing but to take time and patience; to trust, out of pure love, that she might be very miserable; and to wait.

However, there was not in all Christendom an individual with less intention of being very miserable than Gerty, who received her brother with the most undiscouraged countenance and the happiest smiles in the world. Joe, though his heart melted within him to his "little sister" in her beautiful triumph and glory of new life, poured out manfully on Gertrude's head all the denunciations and advices with which he had been "crammed" by Mrs. Maria. He appealed to her good sense, to her pride, to her luxurious habits; he tried all the means of "putting a stop to it," which his own and his wife's united wisdom had suggested. He stood out as long as he could against Gerty's coaxing of her "dear old Joe," and was kissed and had his whiskers pulled ineffectually to vulgar eyes; but Gerty knew so well, by old experience, when his opposition became a sham, and could calculate so surely upon the entire ultimate giving in of her good brother, that she was not so frightened as she ought to have been.

"A fellow who is only a parson!" growled Joe, who

looked all the more savage as his displeasure died out of him, and his moment of succumbing approached.

"Only a parson; but wait till we are a bishop," said Gerty, sitting down close by her brother, and putting her arm through his. This time Joe's growl was inarticulate, and he paused to think what he should say next. He was very near vanquished, and he not only knew it himself, but felt tolerably sure that Gerty knew it also. He struck one last blow, like a true knight, for his lady's sake.

"A bishop!" cried Joe, with all the disdain he could put into his good-humored voice. "I don't believe he's got influence enough to secure a decent living. What interest can he make?"

"Not the least in the world," cried Gerty, with her proud joy and triumph. "Not so much as Madge or Amy—none whatever! not enough for a curacy. Do you think there's no justice in the world, you heathen old Joe?"

"Justice in the world? what on earth do you mean? the girl's crazy," cried the bewildered Joe.

"Not half so crazy as *you* are," said Gertrude, with those smiles of undisturbable happiness which it was not in Joe's heart to resist. "To think of Everard Fielding wanting interest like any poor curate! What do you suppose he got his other gifts for, if he must have influence too? You might as well say he ought to have been rich, or had a duke's titles. Do you think God gives everything to one man, you infidel? Do you suppose there is no compensation to be left for the others, that *he* should have all the world?"

"Upon my word, Gerty," said the astonished Joe, "if your parson is such a highflyer, I had better give in, for the sake of my own wisdom; but do you think, you foolish girl, that a man can get himself made a bishop in this country merely because he's a very clever fellow and tries for it? Oh, Gerty! Gerty! how little you know!"

"I don't suppose anything of the kind," cried Gerty, indignantly; "but when he is not a clever fellow, only a great man, and does *not* try for it?" she added, looking once more with all her renewed smiles and triumphant assurance in her brother's face.

Joe "gave it up;" all this confidence in the almost unknown "parson" had an involuntary effect upon him. There was certainly something moving, in his English mind, in that last argument, "And does not try for it!" Joe had heard of gifts which fell to some men in the noble course of their own labor and duty. Such things were out of the common way, certainly, but so was Gerty; and Gerty's happiness more than all the arguments in the world mollified her brother. When he met Fielding that same afternoon—for Gertrude's lover came to see her, though the paternal invitation did not make him welcome as it might have done a suitor of greater pretensions—Joe gave in entirely. He was not prepared for the frank and manful accost of this intruder into the family, for his brief explanation which meant so much, and for his perfectly courageous and happy gaze into that future where Joe saw nothing but perplexity and misery. He could not think now with any comfort of his father's plan of time and patience and a long engagement. His heart smote him to think of joining in any conspiracy which had for its end to "tire out" these two, and bring jars and misunderstandings between them. It might be very good family policy to prevent an unsuitable marriage; but in face of the proposed subjects of this experiment, Joe felt guilty and indignant. He made up his mind to have no hand in the matter; he did not comfort himself with thinking that there might possibly be something in these two, which, necessity urging, could live through a year or two, and keep misunderstandings out.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE announcement of Gertrude's engagement, which was specially conveyed to Amy by Gertrude herself, made no small sensation in the Willesham cottage, where it sounded at the first telling like a fairy tale. Crawford, who, the session almost over, "town" half empty, and the prospect of a considerable round of visits before him, gave more time than usual at present to his family, happened to be at home when that intimation came. He said very little about it then, and he still said little next day, when he returned to town, and was consulted by his father on this grave and unforeseen misfortune.

"You know, sir, I am not in circumstances to say much about Gertrude's foolishness, or to her," said the candid member of Parliament. "I cannot even do my poor wife the injury of speaking to my sister as fully as I can do to you. I believe a marriage out of one's condition is the most fatal mistake one can make. I have found it so; but, of course, anything I can say to Gertrude must be injured by the force of my own example, and by a proper consideration for poor Amy. This Fielding is a very clever fellow. If I could have made my protest with any grace, considering that it was on my account you first asked him here, I should have done so.

We throw ourselves into danger, but women *might* be guarded from it—danger of that kind at least. What have you resolved to do?"

"Nothing, my dear boy, nothing. I find it very hard to make a disturbance with Gerty; few people understand that girl; she is a wonderful creature, very," said Mr. Crawford. "I have made up my mind, Charley, that the best thing I can do is to keep everything quiet and wait. I shall not smooth their way for them; and they can't do it, sir; they can't do it—it's totally impossible. He has only his college fellowship, which, of course, lapses when he marries, and forty pounds a year left over of his living after he pays his

curates! and I must do him the justice to say that I don't think Gerty's little fortune weighs with him at all in the matter," said the old gentleman, with the candor of an honorable enemy. "A remarkable man in his way, Charley; certainly not a common man. I have not inquired what their own intentions are; and I don't mean to do so. My plan is to let them wait, say nothing about it, take no notice, and they'll fall to misunderstandings and tire themselves out."

Crawford pleased the old gentleman considerably by commending and approving of this policy in very different terms from those which had been used that very morning by Joe.

"Ah, Charley is a man of the world," Mr. Crawford said to himself when he was alone, his heart returning to its old partiality for his once favorite son.

Charley was like his father; it had been said so since he was an infant, and the old man flattered himself that the resemblance had not decreased with years. Now that Charley was successful, and a rising man, Mr. Crawford was pleased to think that his son was like him, and that such as Charley was, with all his ascertained success and promise of distinction, he himself, but for his own superior standing of eldest son and head of the family, might have been. Charley's approval confirmed him in his own scheme; he looked forward with the steady unconscious cruelty of old age at those years which were to extinguish the hopes, and break the heart, and drain the life out of his youngest and favorite child. He was not an ogre; he did not gloat over the pangs, and count the life-drops which would exhaust Gertrude's happiness; he was only the dignified father of a wilful young lady, who was to be kept, if possible, from marrying beneath her—of a beautiful woman who ought to make a brilliant match and distinguish herself by that only mode of distinction possible to Mr. Crawford's daughter; and so the old man sat in his elbow-chair, with half an eye upon his newspaper; sat, sensible as he was, with his lease out, and the holding all unrenovable of those threescore years and ten, which had brought him to the quiet retirement of old age, looking forward with unremorseful eyes on these imaginary future years.

And his son who had just left him said to himself with a

singular mixture of vexation and anxiety, much unlike filial tenderness, "My father is failing fast," as he went upstairs.

Fortunately Gertrude was not there to receive her loving brother's congratulations or remonstrances; he left his love for her with Madge, and was not sorry to avoid the interview. It was clear that, whatever happened, he could take no active part in any family opposition to Gertrude's marriage; he who feared her partial possession of his secret; he who believed that she could if she would use it with fatal force against him; he who, doubtful of what she had learned or found out, feared everything with the consciousness of guilt, and was all uncertain how far a point of honor would restrain the woman who wished to marry a poor man, and who might promote her personal advantage by his overthrow; he was clearly not the man to exasperate Gerty. He kept wisely clear of the whole business, expressing no opinion, approving of his father's plan, but saying little even to him of his own sentiments on the matter; to Gertrude herself he was very polite now as always. He said to her when they did meet, that he was not the man who could throw a stone at her glass house—he who dwelt in one so manifest himself. If anything could have appalled Gertrude, it would have been that comparison. Charley, too, had made a *mésalliance*, and married for love. Heaven deliver us from such love-matches as that which existed in the Willesham cottage!

As for Amy, she was not much more delighted than the rest of the family with the news of this new connexion. She was fond of Gerty, and clung to her with a mingled admiration, confidence, and love. Gerty seemed to the poor little woman an embodiment of everything that was to be trusted and depended upon; but Gerty in the red-brick parsonage, surrounded by all the sordid cares of poverty,—Gerty, whom she knew only in Rookley, mistress and queen over a great house,—what would become of Gerty? it was worse than the spinster cottage with Madge and the two maids. And love, love!—that love which had failed to poor Amy so miserably, and gone out of her life like a Will-o'-the-wisp—would love make amends for it all?

She sat down and shook her hand, and cried over Gerty's

self-delusion ; coming, in all her unworldliness, and the tender weakness of her heart, to a conclusion very like that of Mrs. Maria, very like old Mr. Crawford's hard and worldly judgment ; the mistake on poor Amy's part being, however, a sadly natural and innocent one. She thought *she* had made a marriage of love—she the poor gratified, grateful child, who scarcely knew more of what she was about than her own little Edward did, and whose heart had been seared and murdered in her too soon after to admit of any just development of that capability. *She* sat crying in her superior knowledge and experience over Gerty, believing that she *did* know so much and so sadly better, the poor little woman ! The next time she saw her sister-in-law, she kissed her silently with tears, she could not bring her lips to say any congratulations. If she had been often wistfully afraid before of the problematical evils which might crush Gerty's spirit, and subdue her courage, she was full of more active pity now. Poor beautiful, magnificent Gerty ! was she, too, about to decline into the disenchanted plain, and begin the dreary common battle of everyday life ?

Gertrude herself, however, was not in the least degree troubled by anybody's prognostications. True, it was somewhat of a puzzle to think of living upon that forty pounds a-year ; out of which, however, she took so much enjoyment and made so many laughing impossible calculations, that it grew fairly money and a classic income to Everard's eyes. Her own little revenue, Gerty knew by intuition was not to be taken into account in the matter, without a much more serious balance on Everard's side. Something else, however, deterred them from any conclusion in respect to their marriage, more effectually than the question of money. Mr. Crawford was visibly ailing, though *he* did not acknowledge, nor perhaps perceive it. Once, and once only, with the lightest touch of words that could make it comprehensible, Gertrude had let her lover understand that she could not leave Rookley while her father lived, unless some new arrangement could be made for his ease and comfort ; and when that father began to droop and fall into a slowly and gently increasing feebleness, nothing more was said of the immediate future. They were to

"wait:" the old man smiled in his private heart over the words; he did not think of the youthful pity and affection which saw his days declining, and put away all troublous changes for his sake.

"They will wait long enough," he said to himself, in his strange natural self-delusion, and he did not forbid "the parson" to come occasionally to Rookley, nor attempt to interfere in the correspondence which was carried on between them. "Time and patience, Maria; time and patience, my boy. Let Gertrude have time to think, and time to quarrel with him and herself, and we shall see the result," he said, rubbing his hands, as that autumn fell into winter. Even Mrs. Maria was awed a little by the strange human ignorance of these words. The long probation and disappointment he had doomed them to, *might* come to Everard and Gertrude, but *he* should not be there to see.

CHAPTER XLII.

"So Gertrude is to marry a parson, a fellow who has nothing! not to speak of poor dreamy Madge, whose parson won't marry *her*. What do you all mean by this sort of thing, Charley?" said uncle Molyneux. "A splendid woman like Gerty! a creature that might be a duchess! What is your father, that he does not shut her up and keep her on bread and water till she comes to herself?—but I suppose you all intend to give in, and give the young couple your blessing, eh? I'd see them at Jericho first! but that's your way at Rookley—everybody happy, and all for love!"

"If Gerty holds out," said Crawford, in a significant voice.

"Oh, no fear of her holding out! She has lots of the devil in her, handsome though she is; if that's your dependence, I don't advise you to trust much to it," said uncle Molyneux. "If I were a young fellow, and had such a chance, I'd be deuced proud of Gerty. I'd do a good deal before I gave her up. What sort of a fellow is this?"

"Oh, he's clever," said Crawford, with a little condescension, "and the kind of man to get on if he had a beginning. I dare say that's his own opinion. I shouldn't wonder but he thought he had got the beginning in securing Gerty. Unfortunately there's no family living connected with Rookley; if there had been, *he* could not have had much benefit there, for that, of course, would have been forestalled long ago."

"Ah! that would have fallen to your share, Charley," said uncle Molyneux, with a chuckle: "an exemplary parson you'd have made. Perhaps you all mean to do something for this desirable addition to your family: get him a rich living, eh? If I had such a toy in my power, I might give it to Gerty fast enough; but she should never marry a parson, that girl, if she was a daughter of mine. Your father is not what he used to be, Charley; he's wearing out."

"My father's failing fast, sir," said Crawford, with proper gravity; "but he is quite as little inclined to consent to Gertrude's marriage as you could be. *He* thinks, however, that as there can be nothing before them but a long engagement, they will tire themselves out. You understand, uncle," added the member of Parliament, with a dubious, half-contemptuous smile, "that I cannot take much share in condemning Gertrude. I disapprove of the whole concern to the utmost; but strong and decided opposition, considering my own circumstances, would come very badly from me."

"Ah, that's true enough; but you've done very well, Charley—very well, my boy, considering all things," said uncle Molyneux. "I'd rather have your little Amy with her babies, than Joe's rich wife with all her money, and not a creature to inherit it; though, of course, that's all the better for one of your boys, one day or other. No, I don't see that you need to scruple about *your* circumstances; besides, your wife takes your rank and not you hers—a very different thing with Gerty. Parsons are tolerable enough when they are such parsons as Hastings here—five thousand a-year of his own besides his living; preaches a gentlemanly sermon once a week, and leaves the rest to his curates. A very clever fellow too; you'll see him a bishop one of these days: that's a kind of parson one has no objection to; but I suppose

he's quite of a different metal this new brother-in-law of yours?"

"Incumbent of St. Abraham's, Bethnal Green, with two hundred a year and two curates to pay out of it, speaks of ten thousand people and the social science, and teaching them how best to help themselves," said Crawford, with a smile.

Uncle Molyneux responded with a long-drawn breath which almost sounded like a whistle of amazement and derision.

Gerty's highflown estimate of her parson would have found but little favor in the eyes of uncle Molyneux. Nevertheless, though he was an enemy, he was not an ungenerous one. He meant to oppose the marriage by every means in his power, and next time he saw her would storm at Gerty as nobody else had ventured to do, and without being coaxable like Joe. But uncle Molyneux had so much more insight into Gertrude's character than either her father or brothers, and so much more respect for his beautiful young relation at the bottom of his heart, that he was very sceptical on the subject of Gertrude's probable submission. And, half consciously, he made a private memorandum—with a kind of odd secrecy and clandestineness, not to let himself know his meaning—of her lover's name and whereabouts. If a good living fell into uncle Molyneux's way within the next year or two, Everard had quite as good a chance as another of getting the first offer of it; notwithstanding which, uncle Molyneux was ready to swear at Gerty—perhaps did so: it is not a matter into which one inclines to inquire too particularly—and the mad folly which tempted her to marry a parson and throw herself away.

This conversation took place at Molyneux Hall, where Crawford had gone on the rising of Parliament to pay his usual visit to his uncle. The rising politician had now no lack of occupation for the interregnum of the year; he was going down to Scotland this autumn with a distinguished party, to the shooting-lodge of an ex-minister, who would carry the member for Fantwich "in" with him on his next return to power; and in the meantime had to please his constituents and make them a speech which would occupy the newspapers for a day in this blank season, and bring Mr.

Crawford's sentiments before the world ; and to see and keep on friendly terms with the ruling family at Fantwich, who had another son almost old enough for Parliament, and who had to be conciliated and kept in good-humor, lest it might occur to them to substitute in Mr. Crawford's place their own Honorable George. Then Crawford, with his wife and children, was to spend the Christmas at Molyneux Hall, where festivities were spoken of, such as had not been attempted there for years, and when now the position of the heir was as distinctly understood and established as though he had been the son of Mr. Molyneux.

Matters had changed wonderfully with Crawford since that first doubtful Christmas visit to Rookley, when he had taken his poor little wife to be introduced to his friends. Molyneux Hall was now proud of the heir who threw the lustre of personal distinction upon its bright and arrogant newness, and added a bluer blood to the already respectable gentility of the resuscitated house of Molyneux. *His* industry was of a description for which no allowance or excuse needed to be made. *He* had never made any vulgar money, or been of use to anybody all his life : even the present Mr. Molyneux, in spite of his success and wealth, was not so popular as his recognised successor. Instead of being a passive recipient of descended greatness, he conferred honor in lieu of the wealth he was to inherit, and uncle Molyneux was very proud of "that fellow Charley's" speeches, read them and quoted them, and contradicted them, and was rather pleased when Crawford went direct in the face of his own opinions, and took his own course without reference to his relative's erratic and uncertain creed. This was a kind of subtle compliment which suited and gratified Mr. Molyneux. It was the highest testimonial to his English justice and high-mindedness and love of fair-play.

With all these successes and prosperities upon him, Charles Crawford went down to Scotland with his party anything but a happy man. He was to be out of the way for so many weeks, unable to forestall any private attacks which might be made upon him, or to defend himself, and with all his prospects and felicities hanging upon that dreadful thread so insecure

and brittle, which Gertrude's steady slender fingers, if she chose, were sufficient to snap. He could not help fancying to himself in his ignorance, how the two lovers might sit together discussing himself and his household. He would not have hesitated, had his own circumstances been the same, to serve himself by a brother's misadventure; and why should Gertrude hesitate, who had never been his friend, and had scarcely known him as her brother? *He* would have taken lofty ground, and said it was his duty that uncle Molyneux ought to be disabused of his delusion, and the culprit punished; and why should not Gertrude and her clergyman stand upon an equal moral elevation? He imagined the two comparing notes and laying their experiences together. He could fancy how Everard would describe Amy, what she had been—and a momentary glimpse of his lovely little girlish wife returned to him with perhaps the first compunction for *her* sake which he had ever felt; and how Gertrude would bring forward Mr. Fordham's story, and his own passion; and how, bit by bit, they would ferret out the truth.

He followed this imaginary scene so often in his mind that it pursued him everywhere. It did not occur to him, experienced man as he was, that the betrothed couple had many things to talk of and think of which were much more important to them than *his* affairs; that designs against the estates and riches of uncle Molyneux were totally contrary to the character of both, and that at present, when they met in the brief and few interviews permitted to them, Everard and Gertrude were almost too much occupied with each other to discuss even their immediate prospects. Crawford had forgotten that brief delusion which he himself once called love; he was a middle-aged man to whom success and prosperity were the sole things of interest; he no longer realized the unlikely folly that people of sense could occupy themselves with love-making, and he dreaded these two and their meetings with a bitter and suspicious fear.

And then his son, his Edward, the beautiful boy who looked up in his face, and wanted to know if it was not wickedness which made aunt Gerty say such a word as "dishonorable." To be sure the child had forgotten all about that scene weeks

ago, but Crawford did not think so ; he forgot what it was to be a child as well as what it was to be a lover ; he thought the boy had never been quite the same since ; he suspected Edward, too, to be brooding over that passage of arms ; the yoke of his transgression was hard and heavy on his shoulders. It almost seemed as though it could never again be lifted off.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THIS time was one of no small uneasiness and trouble to the family of Rookley. To watch the gradual dying of an old man—who had held with due honor and dignity, and not without much affection and fatherly kindness, the place of household head during the whole lifetime of the younger generation—who had been the grand bond of family unity to them all, the maintainer of the family home and the old state of things unchanged since they were children—was not a cheerful task to any of them. Though everything was in the usual course of nature—though his age was a ripe old age, and he had seen his children's children—and though his natural successor was to take his place, and the race and the house continue as of old—it was sad to see the old man die by degrees, sitting in his own place, which seemed too entirely his ever to admit another.

There are even aggravations to such a natural calamity in the circumstances of a landed and long-established family. The father dies in a poorer home, and whatever changes may follow, unless there is actual overthrow and want to be looked for, the survivors linger behind, the house is not necessarily abandoned, and there is no inevitable scattering of the remnants of the household ; but when the heir is ready to take possession—when the younger children must disperse and separate themselves, and “the present family” supplant the last—it is strange if there are not some little pangs of involun-

tary mortification and injury, real or imagined, to increase the natural grief. Gertrude, for instance, most unjustly and unkindly, could not but be vexed when Mrs. Maria inquired with any particularity into the old man's complaints, or offered any opinion upon them, and resented with a special bitterness any suggestion which her sister-in-law had to make of any change in the arrangements, or alteration in the house. She knew it was wrong, she knew she was unjust, but she could not help it; her father was dying, nothing in the world could long postpone that certainty of his old age, and Gertrude for the first time in her life was jealous of his heir. She was even fonder of him now for having thwarted him. He had been a good father with all his faults, and she could not bear to think of seeing "somebody else," as she said to herself, in his place, not even though that somebody else was her favorite brother, the dear old Joe of her much-indulged and favored youth.

When Crawford went to Scotland, his wife and children were invited to Rookley, a circumstance which by no means added to his comfort, though he had no excuse for ordering them back again when they were once settled there. The old gentleman softened and mellowed in his decline, as old men so often do; he was glad to have his grandchildren round him, and to lean upon the shoulder of the bold boy who was to carry on his race. Edward was old enough now, with a little stumbling over the big words, which the grandpapa did not object to, to read his newspaper for him in the morning when his own eyes failed, and very ready to talk, with a child's prompt assent and amusing objections, of anything in the world which grandpapa chose to suggest. Then the old man, half entertained and half pathetic, fell into an old man's philosophies and advices, which the boy listened to with bright open eyes, and much wonder, and some comprehension.

It had begun to dawn upon Mr. Crawford's mind by this time that he should not live to see Edward grow up, or to give him those wise necessary counsels which would help him on at Eton and fortify him for his university life. That was the first confession of his own state which he made to himself. So this melancholy, amusing intercourse grew more and more intimate between the grandsire and the child. He liked to

have Edward always by; he made monitory observations on everything with a certain pathetic yearning to print himself and his opinions on this young memory, and sometimes with a smile of pleasure and satisfaction, sometimes with a sigh of failure, listened to the eager "Yes, grandpapa," with which Edward received everything. "And yet, if he does not understand it now, he will recollect it afterwards," said Mr. Crawford to himself, and so went on melting down the experiences of his long life into prudent maxims and wise sayings for the boy beside him. Edward listened always with the same bright surprise and eager interest, and often enough with a gleam of ready childish understanding in his candid eyes. It was strange to hear the old man of the world at the end of his life employing all the strength that remained to him in thus conveying his slowly gathered wisdom, much of it so strangely unlike and unsuited to his auditor, to the ears of this child; but it was sometimes an affecting scene.

One day, when Mr. Crawford had been impressing upon the boy the sacred necessities of *honor*; that whatever a man did, he must keep his word sacred and his honor pure if he would gain any respect or credit among other men, which, in spite of all grandpapa's moralities, was the highest motive which he commonly insisted upon; the boy startled his instructor by a sudden pout and flush of childish anger.

"Aunt Gerty once said something about being dishonorable to papa," said the boy. "Grandpapa, I said directly it was very wicked and cruel. I love aunt Gerty; there is always great fun when she comes to Willesham; but I have not been half so fond of her since then."

Which was a great fib; Master Edward having remembered nothing about the matter till the present subject under discussion, and a great opportunity of distinguishing himself, brought it back, by a child's subtle thread of association, to his mind.

"Your aunt Gerty once said something about dishonor to your papa?" cried the old man, growing red with the sudden passion of feebleness. "Nonsense, child! your aunt Gerty could do no such thing; you must have misunderstood what she said."

"But she did though," cried Edward, angry to be doubted, and growing still more angry as he thought of it. "I did not misunderstand her; they thought I was not old enough to know,—but she did! and I knew quite well, and said she was very wicked and cruel. Yes, grandpapa, she did!"

"Go this moment and call Gerty to me," cried the angry old man. "I must know what this means. Go at once, sir—do you hear me?—and tell her to come here instantly. Dishonorable! *my* son, Charley! I must know what this means."

"I don't know where aunt Gerty is, please, grandpapa," said Edward, with another pout and hesitation: he did not exactly like to distinguish himself after this fashion, by turning accuser and quarrelling with his aunt.

"Go this instant, sir!" cried Mr. Crawford, half rising from his chair, and stammering with passion. "Go, go this moment, or I shall think you have told me what is not the truth."

On this hint, Edward went with great loftiness and indignation, and presently, disdaining to explain what she was wanted for, returned with Gerty somewhat alarmed, and in a little excitement. She thought a new attack had come on, or that her father was worse.

"Has anything happened, papa? what is the matter?" cried Gertrude, anxiously, as she came in at the door.

"The matter! come here, Gerty; here where I can see you," said her father, impatiently; "and you, sir, here: now let me know what it means at once. Edward tells me that you accused his father of something dishonorable, when you were at Willesham, in—ah, ah, when was it, child?—of dishonorable practices!—Charley!—*my* son!—I want to know instantly what it means?"

"Accused Charley of dishonorable practices!—I! I am sure I never did any such thing," cried Gertrude, with natural indignation.

"If you have told me a lie, sir," exclaimed the angry grandpapa, grasping his cane; "if you have told me a lie, you shall —"

Mr. Crawford was in too great a passion for words, and Edward, as was natural, grew flaming red and furious with

childish rage: it was an extraordinary interruption of their usual friendship.

"Stay a moment, papa," said Gerty; "let me think; Charley and I are not always good friends. I do not believe Ned would tell a lie, and I am sure he would not try to get me into trouble, unless he thought he was right; wait a moment till I think."

At this expression of confidence, Edward's heart smote him, he was very like to cry, but the cane was still in grandpapa's hand, so the boy held up his head and fronted him; he would not give in till he was justified.

"I know Edward is wrong," said Gerty; "but I rather think he may be right, too. I remember some words I had once with Charley, when he reproached me with trying to fix something dishonorable upon him. I did no such thing, as you may be sure, but of course Edward, like a good boy, thought his papa must be right."

"And what on earth could you be talking of, you and Charley, which could admit the possibility of any dishonor?" cried Mr. Crawford, only half satisfied.

"Indeed, papa, I cannot tell you. We were speaking of Amy, and an illness she had, and some strange delusion which she took up about her first poor little baby," said Gertrude, with some little hesitation; "but how any dishonor could be involved in that, I cannot tell. I remember being very much amazed at the time. I suppose it was only an expression of passion on Charley's part."

"About Amy, and her first baby—the child that died? I don't understand this, Gerty," said Mr. Crawford.

"Neither did I, papa, nor Charley himself, I rather think," said Gertrude. "He was very angry with me, and said the first sharp thing that came into his head. I do not believe anything was meant at all, and I forgot all about it half an hour after," said Gerty, with a heightened color and sudden smile, after a little pause; which was another fib, unintentional, like Master Edward's, for Gertrude had not forgotten it; but then she had thought so much more of what accompanied these words, and the other subject which was introduced then for the first time to her plain and open con-

sideration; Charley's honor, of which his sister never had any real suspicion, interested her so much less both now and *then*, than that first open announcement of Everard Fielding as Gerty's "lover."

"Come here, Edward; I beg your pardon, my boy, for supposing you could tell a lie," said his grandfather. "Don't cry; your aunt Gertrude has quite justified you. Now you may go and play for an hour; I've got something to think about. Yes, you may leave me too, Gerty; I can ring the bell if I want anything. I wish Charley was here."

With this doubtful, uneasy expression, the old man sank back into his chair; very likely, after a while he went to sleep; but he was not comfortable about this incident. He was a man of the world, and so was Charley; he could not understand a man committing himself by such an expression, "unless something was really wrong, and he forgot himself for the moment," the invalid said to himself, with a remnant of his old acuteness. Charley, whom he had begun again to be so proud of! It put a thorn in Mr. Crawford's pillow for that night.

"So you tried to get me into trouble, Ned?" said Gertrude, pulling his ears as they went out together. "I did not think you could have been so unkind. Now, I'll tell you something: I never supposed your papa was dishonorable, but sometimes he's rather ill-tempered; do you hear?—not to you, because you are his son and his pet, but to other people; and when you hear him say cross things to me or any one, you are not to go and tell grandpapa that we said them to *him*, for that is not fair."

"I am not a tell-tale; I don't tell stories!" cried poor Edward, crying with childish vexation and shame.

"No, I am sure you are not," said aunt Gerty, and kissed him, as she went back to the drawing-room.

Edward, desperately remorseful and ashamed of himself, only waited till she was out of sight, and then flew upstairs to pour his griefs into the ear of his mother, for he was not old enough yet to have become shy of that unfailing resource. Amy, as may be supposed, was deeply interested in the story, incoherent as it was. Though she could not make out the

circumstances from Edward's tale, she saw, like her husband, with a perception quickened by the guilt she shared, that there was danger to their secret in any suspicion of Gertrude's. But Amy was not terrified by the thought, though the idea of betraying it in her own person, or of being the cause, thus, of her husband's ruin, paralysed her with fright and fear; the idea that it might be found out independent of her, by somebody else, strangely enough, did not alarm Amy. Her bosom expanded with a long, deep sigh when her boy left her comforted. Oh, if it were but known! if that secret weight were off her heart! if she could feel that she got only her due in everybody's opinion, and might repent her great sin honestly before the world! She thought of her husband more warmly, more tenderly, than it seemed to be in that discouraged woman to think when that idea came to her. She thought she could grow bold and strong to comfort him in his ruin, if it were but known. She imagined herself putting her arm into his, and standing up with him, the sharer of his sin, to lighten its punishment; perhaps—oh, heavenly consolation!—going forth with him hand in hand to seek Aprile, to take the baby back to her yearning heart. Poor Amy did not ask herself if her husband was a man to accept or care for the womanish solace and support which she could offer. She only comforted herself with the imagination, as women will, and felt stronger, bolder, more confident, for a moment, than she had done for years. The effect of this sudden fear and uncertainty was very different upon that husband and wife.

CHAPTER XLIV.

GERTRUDE, however, as it happened, thought no more of her brother's secret, if he had one, after this occurrence than she had done before it. She was very fully occupied, to tell the truth. The business of the estate fell more and more upon her during her father's present weakness; for he was jealous of his rights still, and by no means disposed to call in Joe; and now that he was always ill, he was fidgety and exacting to an utterly unreasonable extent, and called for Gerty at all hours, when he himself woke from the fitful and short slumbers of age, to serve all kinds of caprices; to write letters for him, and keep up correspondences which had been long intermitted; to make memoranda of sudden novel ideas which had occurred to him for the improvement of the land which he farmed; to let him know the particulars of trifling accounts which suddenly crossed his recollection, and which "must, be paid to-morrow;" and sometimes to go back for some years into the family accounts, and let him know what this and that, specially undertaken for the benefit of some one member of the family, had cost him; Emily's outfit for India, for example, and the expenses of Charley's election.

"Ah, Charley's election—that is his failure, Gerty—the Hocking business; let me have all the items of that," he said, eagerly.

For these inquiries Gerty was called out of her sound youthful rest at earliest dawn and sometimes in the middle of the night. He did not sleep, and when he was awake he was in a fever till he had his daughter within reach. Sometimes, but very seldom, it seemed to occur to him that he exacted a good deal from Gerty; but as Gerty never looked the worse for her broken rest and prolonged vigils—as she was strong at once in the youth and maturity of her womanhood, and never either made a complaint or suffered one to be made for her—it was a very unfrequent thought; and still, when he was dressed for the day and assisted into his favorite easy-chair,

and felt himself again, he rubbed his hands and assured Joe and Mrs. Maria of the certain success of his old scheme.

"Ah, Gerty must not be thrown away: she will think better of it; a long engagement will sicken her heart of this parson. Ah, we shall see in a year or two," he still said, and meanwhile took all poor Gerty's affectionate service, and called her up to execute his fantastic commissions in the chill depth of these winter nights. If she had been pale or shown any evidences of heart-sickness, perhaps the old man might have repented of his unconscious cruelty; but Gerty was perfectly well and happy, undaunted by any thoughts of a long engagement, proudly confident in Everard and everything he did or could do; happier, but for her anxiety about her father, than she had been all her life; and why should he relent?

However, when he gave his reluctant consent to Everard's first visit, and when "the parson" came, with a niggardly invitation to stay one night, the invalid could not resist the charm of his manful presence. Fielding made no sham to please this old man of the world. He did not tell him the gossip of which he always heard a little—for Everard's college friends, among whom there were some sons of great people, somehow could not manage to forget the poor parson, and "looked him up" occasionally with useless demonstrations of friendship—of the great world. He did not make the most of the new fashionable acquaintances he had, as a man of the world might have advised him to do, and keep his own profession as much as possible out of sight. On the contrary, he carried the old gentleman off with a frank impetuosity into the very heart of the district of St. Abraham's, interested him positively in spite of his will, won him to laughter, moved him to frequent wiping of his spectacles, and made Bethnal Green actually a human place full of sympathies, and sorrows, and delights, to the dignified eyes of Mr. Crawford of Rookley. It was very amazing, but it was true, and nobody could tell how he did it; for it was certainly not by means of sentimental sketches, or picturesque, impossible heroes. His personages were all homogeneous and natural, neither unreasonably bad nor incredibly virtuous; yet somehow the old man in his

library got interested in them, and was as much concerned about the termination of one story—then incomplete—as if it had been an interrupted *Pendennis*, stayed by the illness of the author.

“Come again, soon,” he said involuntarily, as he shook hands with him, forgetting altogether that this was Gerty’s unsuitable lover, whom he hoped to tire Gerty out of her affection for, and only conscious that he had been extremely amused and interested, and had forgotten a good many of his usual little afternoon plagues and vexations, and had a certain unusual warmth and glow at his heart. “If he had only been in Parliament!” cried the old man, when Everard was gone; “or at the bar! or anything but a parson. Why doesn’t the fellow write a book at least?”

“Because he has something else to do,” cried Gerty, whom her father believed to be out of hearing, raising the brightest face in the world at his elbow, full of conscious joy and triumph. Mr. Crawford “pshawed” and “humphed” a little, and said nothing more at that moment, but his heart smote him when he recollected how Gerty had been scribbling at his bedside at five o’clock of this wintry morning, and how he had detained her after breakfast, though he knew very well the lover was waiting below; and for a single second acknowledged to himself that the same lover had given up this afternoon to amuse *him* in his sickness and age and helplessness, and had succeeded as very few could have been able to succeed. Why should these two young people, who were indisputably so fond of each other, give up so much of their unfrequent and brief holiday to the pleasure of the unreasonable old man who meant so cruelly towards them in his heart? Such a thought did once come into the unaccustomed mind of Mr. Crawford of Rookley; it was difficult to say what could have brought it; perhaps the unconscious influence of all he had been hearing had startled him out of the confirmed self-indulgence which was so habitual, that he would have been utterly startled by the idea that it was not exactly the proper principle of conduct. Why should not he have everything he wanted? Why should he think of anybody else before himself; but still there were some people in the world

who did; and somehow that was so much the better for the world.

Mrs. Maria, too, began to be a little moved out of her opposition—which had already for some time ceased to be solemn, a manner entirely out of her way, and had become satirical, venting itself in ludicrous conjectures as to Gertrude's future occupations—by further acquaintance with Fielding. She gave in unconsciously, and was not aware of having done so, even now. The general feeling of the household was in a state of amelioration towards Gertrude's unlucky engagement, and this result was increased by a letter from Madge's curate, received shortly after the visit of Everard. That unfortunate individual was evidently in a savage state of discontent; the mildness, the suavity, the grace of his Anglicanism was not to be traced in that ill-tempered epistle. He was sick of himself and his surroundings, sick of Italy, tired of all the world. He no longer called her his "sister Magdalen," but "Madge," plain "Madge," with a startling, common-life abruptness, which brought a blush to her cheeks. He confounded all her pretty romantic fancies by violent denunciations of monks and convents, and by declarations that the air stifled him, and that there was no room to breathe. He had spent the summer in Rome and thereabouts; perhaps his wrath was partially excusable on that score, but it was sufficiently clear that the breath of incense and the glare of candles made rather too heavy an atmosphere for his English lungs, and that wherever he established his permanent place it would not be in the tranquillizing bosom of the Church. Then he plunged into the home news which Madge had sent him. Fielding? to be sure he knew Fielding!—Fielding of John's, the best fellow going! *he* in a London district church, working his life out!—he, with two curates to pay and two hundred a-year! and going to marry Gerty! A long dash of the discontented curate's pen followed these last words. He did not say it was an excessively foolish idea, that they would have nothing to live on, or that he was amazed at their imprudence; he did not even intimate a dignified condemnation of married clergymen, as he would have done a year ago. He only made a most sudden and startling exclamation upon

paper, which utterly confounded his correspondent and made her head swim. "I'll tell you what, Madge, I'm not going to stand this any longer; ask Fielding if he'll have *me* for one of his curates; I'm coming home!"

This agitating communication made poor Madge nervous. Her spiritual guide had for once been aggravated and disgusted out of his so-called spirituality. In that fight of the man and the priest—the Englishman and the Anglican—man and Englishman had got the upper hand. He had come with a considerable rebound, it was evident, out of his quietism and priestly high-flying—so considerable, that he could not take time to account for it, or to soothe down "sister Magdalen," tender and timid and all-believing as she was, into "dearest Madge." Poor Madge was greatly disturbed about this letter: had the temptations of the world prevailed upon him? was the flesh triumphing over the spirit? but Gerty, to whom the epistle was confided, fell half in love instantly with her sister's curate. *He* could appreciate Everard, and the man who could do that was in a highly satisfactory condition, moral and intellectual, to the thinking of Gertrude.

On the whole, the effect of the letter, which, though it was more like a love-letter than poor Madge's gentle, but somewhat prim judgment approved, she was obliged to show, for Everard's sake, to her own intense confusion and suffering, had a very good effect at Rookley. For Madge's curate, though he was a curate, was a curate with a difference. His father was a viscount, his mother had been an heiress, and there were but two sons. When he found the ground solid under his feet, if he ever did, and thought of "settling in life," there was a wealthy benefice in the family. He was an altogether unexceptionable personage, and his opinion bore its due weight, and went into the proper scale.

But Gerty, who grew only brighter and fuller and stronger of life as the concerns of this great household multiplied upon her, till, between her management of everything else, and her services to her father, she had scarcely leisure to write those letters which nevertheless always arrived duly and in proper time at the Bethnal-Green parsonage,—what would Gerty do, when all that current of life intermitted, and she had to change

her entire domestic policy, and bring it down to the modest level of a hundred or two a year! Was it possible to imagine that magnificent figure of hers in the red-brick parsonage? was it credible that Gerty could order chops and potatoes, and see that her parlors were swept and dusted every morning? certainly the imagination was hard enough to receive.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Maria, who could be condescending and compassionate on this one subject, and availed herself of the privilege, "you have not the remotest idea of the value of money. It will be totally impossible for you to have more than one maid. What shall *you* do with one maid, Gerty? She will either dress you and get up Mr. Fielding's white cravats, and then what *will* become of the parsonage? or she will sweep and dust, and boil the potatoes, and leave the cravats and your own dress to you. Fancy Gerty getting up the fine linen! What shall you wear, Gerty? It was great extravagance under the circumstances to give Davies those simple muslins and that old blue silk dress."

"I dare say Davies would give me some of her print dresses if I asked her, so pray don't trouble yourself, Maria," cried Gertrude, laughing; "besides, how illogical you are! If you suppose *we* took a double first-class for nothing, you are very much mistaken," said Gertrude, with that pretty motion of her head to shake off the pretty blush. "I can see perfectly well *now* when an argument is unphilosophical. You wonder how I shall get on when I have so little to do, and yet every question you ask shows I shall have abundance to do! Ah, Maria! Joe was never a fellow of John's, that is certain. What shall I do? You shall see how the cravats look when *I* get them up—you shall know what chops and potatoes are like, on *my* table. Why shouldn't I look after the dusting and the sweeping? What was woman made for, I should like to know?"

"Upon my word, Gerty! I thought shirts and puddings had gone out of fashion; I thought women had 'missions' now-a-days," said Mrs. Maria; "I thought what we had to do was to sweeten, and elevate, and purify, and civilize, and all that sort of thing. I thought you had a very high idea of what women were good for. I really did believe, Gerty, that if the

Queen had commissioned you to form a ministry, you would not have been a bit afraid to undertake it; and to hear this from you!"

"Well," said the undiscouraged Gerty, "I do think I should make a very good Chancellor of the Exchequer; but nobody offers me *that* place; and do you think it is grander to see to Bechamel's *carte*, than to tell Betty what there will be for dinner? I don't! You shall see how Betty and I will get on. Besides, you don't understand me: I like to make and to do, whatever it happens to be, and you think I only like it because I can do it on a great scale, and look important and a great lady. That is because you don't know any better. I rejoice in *making* anything," cried Gertrude, with a laughing vehemence. "When the workmen were at the chapel, I longed for a trowel or a brush. I could stand for an hour and watch the masons building Madge's new cottages down in the village. It is not for the thing, but the pleasure of doing it. I remember once when I was a child taking a fancy to wash some of mamma's old lace. What a delight it was to see it come white."

"To see it come white!—point lace!" cried Mrs. Maria, in undissembled horror. "Ah! I suppose mamma was delighted too, wasn't she, Gerty?"

"I only got whipped," said Gerty, laughing; "but nobody will whip me when I get up the cravats."

So as there was absolutely nothing more to be made of this impracticable and dauntless young woman, the family gradually gave it up in despair.

CHAPTER XLV.

"But it is all very well to talk and to laugh; they *never can do it*; the thing is absolutely impossible," said Mrs. Maria, in confidential privacy to the excellent Joe.

Joe, though he would not undertake to say that anything was impossible "to those two," yet was considerably troubled about the matter. He was far from having come to such an amount of satisfaction with the match as actually to further it and interfere for its completion, but he was somewhat disgusted with that cold-blooded reckoning of the fruits of "a long engagement," and ashamed of himself for having any part in it. The next time Fielding was invited, or rather permitted, to come to Rookley, Joe had some conversation with him on the matter. Mr. Crawford was still more feeble than he had been last time, and was visibly, as everybody could perceive, declining daily, and dying away.

"You will forgive me, my dear fellow," said honest Joe, "but—but your income is a very small one, you know. I need not tell you what Gertrude has been accustomed to, nor what her friends may be reasonably disposed to expect on her behalf. I merely wish to ask calmly and impartially, if you really marry, what *will* you do? You have only two hundred a-year——"

"I have only forty pounds a-year, and my fellowship," said Fielding.

"Your fellowship; which ends when you marry," said Joe, with a little impatience.

"Which ends when I marry," repeated Fielding, with a little heightening of color which proved that epoch to be not quite so matter-of-fact a business with him as it was with Joe. "Let me make myself understood, however. There are circumstances entirely independent of my income which make it impossible for me, as you must perceive, to urge Gertrude——"

"Oh, if you are disposed to risk a long engagement, I can

have no objection," interrupted Joe, not without displeasure.

"There is nothing I am less inclined to submit to," said Everard; "but you must hear me out. You are as well aware as I am, that under present circumstances it would be mere cruelty to urge my own happiness on Gertrude, when her duty, as she believes fervently, and as even *I* believe, lies here."

"You mean while my father is ill," said Joe, with a slight touch of the same momentary jealousy and annoyance which sometimes moved Gertrude, to think of a stranger calculating upon his father's illness or perhaps death.

Fielding assented simply, perceiving and forgiving the feeling, and Joe was somewhat nonplussed.

"I am not sure," he said, with a little irritation, "that you have answered my question. To be sure it is true enough what you say, but——"

"What I say is that in the mean time we can do nothing," said Fielding quickly; "a position which I do not enjoy, I assure you. I am not a superstitious man that I know of; but I feel assured that when we can marry Providence will make the matter of means an easier one than it seems now, when, means or not, we *can't* marry, if we should break our hearts."

Joe said, "Humph!" and was not perfectly satisfied. He did not understand much about Providence, nor think *that* a very safe means of providing marriage settlements and other necessities for his sister. Still it might be proper enough talk for a clergyman. "I suppose you mean a better living will be forthcoming when you want it," he said, sulkily. "I trust you have a good foundation for your hope."

"I mean that I cannot see into the future; though I trust in it," said Fielding. "I know poverty myself and don't fear it; and Gertrude does not know it, but fears nothing in the world. I have told her already, that I do not think my profession admits of ambition or a hunt after fortune. What God sends, if I can do my duty in it, I will take, but I will not deceive you by pretending that I have hopes of a better living. I am young and working hard, and subject to the natural

rules. I will not always be incumbent of St. Abraham's. I know that I cannot twist my forty pounds into an income for Gertrude; but I am obliged to admit that Gertrude cannot for her duty's sake be my wife now. As soon as I can, with due respect to those duties of hers which she does so wonderfully, ask her *when* she will be my wife—and I promise you there shall not be a day lost that I can help—I will lay everything before you and let you know my plans, and I have the greatest confidence that on that day they will be more satisfactory than they are now."

Whether this was merely a plausible speech, or if there was really something in it, not entirely comprehensible to himself, but perfectly characteristic of Everard Fielding, Joe could not quite tell.

He said "Humph!" again. "And so in the mean time," said Joe, dubiously, "you are doing——"

"My duty!" said Fielding, simply, looking at him with his honest eyes. Joe, overcome, had not another word to say; he could not make it out; he could not even repeat his "humph!" with those eyes upon him, but somehow felt that there was something in it, even though it was not intelligible to him, and involuntarily remembered Gerty's heroics in the first flush of her betrothal about a man who might be a bishop because he did *not* try.

Perhaps Everard was not entirely without plans, however, though he did not enlarge upon them to Joe, who, heir of Rookley and husband of a rich wife, was not very likely to understand the expedients of so small an income as that on which, as probabilities went, his sister would begin her life. For Fielding had not the remotest intention of consenting to that long engagement on which Mr. Crawford relied. A great self-sacrifice did not occur now to the incumbent of St. Abraham's. He did not conclude that it would be so much better for Gertrude, if her hard duties were over and her brother reigned at Rookley, to retire to the ladylike spinster establishment which Mrs. Maria had set up for her in imagination, with Madge and the two maids, and the boy with buttons, than to struggle along with himself in the red-brick parsonage; and he had a strong faith in what he had said: he believed that

when Providence removed that barrier which at present made their marriage impossible, and the moment came for that decision, that the means would not be so sadly wanting as everybody supposed.

So he fell to work, not to look out rich vacant livings, or make interest, but to do his duty, as he had been doing it, with perhaps a quickened and a brightened countenance, and a heart more warm to feel for other people's joys and troubles, and more ready to devise help and comfort for other people's calamities. One private thing he was doing besides, which was not required of him, and which nobody knew of—he was laying by the income of his fellowship and living upon his forty pounds a-year. How he managed that he did not confide to anybody, and smiled to himself at the self-suggestion which brought such an expedient to his mind. But he did it, and found inexhaustible amusement in his economics—an amusement secret and to himself, which even Gerty did not hear of. He who was setting out upon an expanded life; he to whom the future was full, he knew not of what results, but he knew of labor and patience and the great life-battle; he to whom love and happiness were coming to strengthen him for his warfare, was well able to afford that fast and vigil ere his new course began.

So he did his duty; and already there was talk of that London district where one man fought the devil and all his works, in the name of that Captain who alone overcame them, and the stir of the battle made itself heard out of Bethnal Green. A great eloquence, a perpetual activity, a heart in one's work, are not such things as may be met with every day; he was not "trying for it;" he was living and working as though in all the world no field of labor existed so all-engrossing and full of interest as Bethnal Green. He was no more laboring for fame and reputation than he was for two hundred pounds a-year; but while he did his work heartily for his work's sake, "to the Lord and not unto man," neither his Master nor his duty forbade him to be a man himself, and to receive what fell to him by the way.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE Christmas festivities at Molyneux Hall, which had excited so much attention in that neighborhood, and to which even the younger Ladies Bolton, still remaining unmarried and at home, looked forward with no small interest, were doomed to a melancholy and unlooked-for interruption. Mr. Crawford's decline, which had at first been so slow and gradual, grew more rapid as the winter deepened. When December began, he had become as helpless as an infant, and was managed like one by the old servant who had been his personal attendant for half a lifetime; and as Christmas came it was no longer possible for the faithful Griffiths, with all his abilities, to maintain the unexceptionable "get up" of the failing invalid. The white cravat, which was a portion of the old man, had to be abandoned in the first place. He made his last journeys to the library in his wheeled chair, muffled up about the neck like a traveller.

"I gev up master," said Griffiths, with a sigh, "when he gev up his white neckercher. Make-believes won't do, no-how, after that. Ah! he's done, sir, is the old gen'leman; and I'm most done too, I reckon, when it comes to that. There ain't much good of an old bit o' lumber like me about the house with a new master and missis—not that I've a word to say again' Mr. Joe nor his lady neyther; but I'm used to master, I am; I've been his own man nigh upon forty year——"

"And a man that's seen such a deal of the family and their ways as you have, Mr. Griffiths," said the butler, who was neither a Rookley man nor an old servant; "in course you'll be well remembered in the will."

"That may be or may not be," said the housekeeper, who happened to be present, and whose expectations, like her pretensions, were considerable; "but there isn't nothing in the ways of our family as wants to be concealed, and Mr. Griffiths knows that as well as me. The old gen'leman is still

a living man, and what with all these nourishing broths and jellies I send up to him every day—here's the tray, Mr. Griffiths—I dare say he'll see Midsummer day yet, which is more than is certain for the strongest among us, as I've seen often and often. It isn't neither safe nor natural, in my opinion, to argue upon the will of a living man, 'specially a man like master, that has the best of doctors, and the best of nourishment to keep him alive."

"Ah, ma'am, but he's done, he is," said Griffiths, shaking his head sadly as he took up his tray, "and he's been a good master, as *I* can answer, and it ain't no satisfaction to me."

"I was not meaning *you*, Griffiths: an old servant isn't like a new interloper, that knows nothing about the matter," said Mrs. Apsley, with dignity.

The new butler withdrew, properly snubbed and silent, and Griffiths went upstairs with his dainty tray and covered basin. The house by this time bore all the sensible signs of a house in which serious sickness lies and Death already throws an ominous shadow before him. When the other servants met Griffiths, he was stopped by whispered inquiries after the master to which, he responded only by solemn shakes of his head. The London butler made solemn marches about his occupations, on tiptoe, with the air of a mute, and answered in a melancholy undertone when he was referred to for answers to the inquiries which all the families round began to send daily. There was great gossip and speculation going on, in half-whispers, in the servants' hall about the new order of things which was imminent, and what Miss Gerty and Miss Madge would do, and which of the old servants would be pensioned, and whether Mrs. Apsley would choose to remain under a new lady; for the housekeeper had her adversaries who considered her "a deal too high," as well as other people.

To the gloomy excitement and melancholy of this house Charles Crawford was summoned by express shortly after his return from Scotland; a little later uncle Molyneux arrived to see the end of his relative and old friend, and Joe and his wife spent the greater part of their time at Rookley. Except for those daily inquiries which by and by would be acknowledged

formally on deeply edged mourning paper, and which at present covered the hall table with cards, and occupied one man almost all the morning, the outer world was shut out for a few weeks from the house where that thread of aged life, brittle as a thread of glass, might snap any day or any moment, and where the sons and the daughters waited to see their father die.

And now that the old man was aware of it, and that "make-believes wouldn't do now, nohow," he filled with very suitable dignity the place of a dying man with his children round him, and lay propped up on his pillows, with Griffiths within call, and his daughters by his bedside, in all the "resignation" and placid, pathetic importance proper to his character and position. The only anxiety which he showed was a certain wistful restlessness about his son Charley, to whom he seemed anxious to speak about something, but who, either by accident or purpose, was never alone with his father. If this was by design it was very bad policy, for as Mr. Crawford grew weaker, his accustomed prudence failed him, and when at last he did address his son on the subject that troubled him, it was when several persons were in the room:—Madge in the nurse's place by the bedside; Joe with the morning paper in his hand from which he had just been reading to his father; and Mrs. Maria was also present on the periodical visit she made to see whether there was anything to be done for him which she or her immediate retainers could do. Joe had been reading an examination in the Insolvent Court, the examination of the son of a neighboring family, who had gone rather too far for the patience of his friends, and at last had been left to himself and suffered to take his own way.

"Come here, Charley," said Mr. Crawford, waving his hand feebly to his younger son, who had just entered the room, "I have something to say to you. Ah, I never left *you* in the lurch, my boy, as old Albany has left Harry! You were an expensive dog when you were at college, and cost both anxiety and money; though, thank Heaven, I never heard an imputation on the honor of any son of mine. *Charley*," said the old gentleman, bending forward to him

with an extraordinary attempt to be confidential and private, though he spoke in a shrill whisper which every individual in the room could hear all the more clearly that it was a whisper, "I've something to say; my mind is not quite easy about you, my dear boy. You were a long time in the world by yourself, beyond the reach of my eye; I should be very thankful if you could tell me, Charley, that all that life of yours, after you were married—on the Continent, you know—was perfectly straight and square."

"Father!" cried Crawford, in dismay, raising his hand with an involuntary movement as though to stop that feeble but unsilenceable voice.

"Eh? there's somebody in the room, to be sure," said the old man, looking round him with dull eyes; "but never mind, soon I shall not be able to say anything to any of you, so I must speak while I have time. Ah, Charley, you are red, you don't look like an innocent man. Your boy Edward told me one day that Gerty had said something to you about dishonor, and Gerty, when I asked her—(Griffiths, isn't it two hours since I had that draught? I'm very feeble this afternoon, Charley)—Gerty said it was yourself who used the word. Charley, my dear boy, I know the world; it's a bad world, but one learns what's in it, when one lives as long as I've done. Why should you have spoken of dishonor if there wasn't some on your conscience? Eh? what's dishonor? that girl Gerty couldn't bring it home to you, my poor boy; she's a woman, and she doesn't know what it is."

"Yet she or somebody else has abused your mind, sir," cried Crawford, who seemed to feel at that moment all the pulses in his frame tingling and throbbing like so many separate lives; but who collected himself with a terrible effort at once to subdue his passion, to speak, and to endure the eyes which were turned upon him from every part of the room. "Some one has slandered me basely, I protest to you, father!"

"Hush, Charley!" said the old man, maundering on slowly and feebly, and waving down his son's defence with a languid movement of his hand; "hush, my boy! I don't like when anybody protests. I've been thinking it over a great deal in my own mind, and the only thing I can conclude upon is

debt—debt, Charley: I've been very scrupulous all my life, but I know the feeling. Ah, that's what it is! I knew I should be right. Debt somewhere that you have come off away from, and never been able to pay. Well, well, when a man's dying he can't be too hard upon his own boy; but, look here, Charley, look here; *get it paid*. My will was made years ago, and I can't change it now; but Joe there is a very good fellow, and he'll lend you the money, or even your uncle Molyneux when he knows that I found it out on my deathbed, and forgave you, my poor boy. Ah! you were younger then! you had only your allowance, and you had a young wife; and the Crawfords of Rookley never learnt how to do things cheaply; but, Charley, my dear fellow, you have boys of your own; it doesn't do to let them know of debts of their father's. As soon as I'm laid in my grave, Charley, *get it paid*."

"But you are deceived—you deceive yourself!" cried Crawford, whom the words seemed to choke. "Hear *me*, father; I ought to know my own concerns best. I defy my accuser, whoever he may be, to prove either debts or dishonor. It is a lie, a slander!—do you hear me, father? Surely in common justice I may be allowed to know my own concerns best!"

"I think I shall try a little sleep, Madge," said the old man, turning from the subject, with that absorbing interest in his own affairs and the personal minutiae of his comforts which it is so hard for people in health to comprehend. He had shown himself anything but indifferent to this matter; it had troubled his mind for weeks, and he had worn out his little strength talking of it. But after he had said his say he was more concerned about the removal of his extra pillow than about his son, and kept directing Madge and Griffiths, who were altering his position, while Crawford stood by in passionate and indignant mortification, almost ready to snatch the pillow from under his father's head, and shock him into listening. When he was arranged to his satisfaction, Mr. Crawford received the draught from his daughter and composed himself to sleep. "Not now, Charley—not now—another time," he said, closing his eyes and waving his feeble *hand*.

"Hush, hush! he is tired; you must not disturb him. Dear Charley, it will be better if you all go away," said Madge, from the bedside.

Mrs. Maria was already gone. Joe, laying down the paper carefully that it might not rustle, got up and withdrew also, looking a little grave. Crawford had no resource but to follow. His restrained passion burst forth as soon as they had left the room.

"Who has put this damnable crotchet into his head?" exclaimed the accused, wiping from his forehead the heavy perspiration which stood there. "By Heaven, it is enough to drive any man mad! What does he mean? Who has invented this abominable fiction to deceive him? If it is Gerty, it is more devilish mischief than I thought her capable of. Joe, why do you not answer me? *You* have heard it before, of course, and you ought to know what it means."

"I never heard it before, nor a whisper of it; and I'll tell you what, Charley," said Joe, with indignation, "I will not hear such words applied to Gerty now."

"Such words! what words? do you think I will bear it from her hands or anybody else's," cried Crawford, "that my father should go down to his grave, believing a lie of me!"

"Gerty tells lies of no one," said Joe, hastily; "but I don't deny it's aggravating enough," he added, after a little pause, "if it really *is* a sick man's crotchet, and has no foundation, as you say: however, it isn't murder, Charley, after all; no need for blowing up the house about it. Let's talk of it after a while when there's more leisure to think of ourselves. I shouldn't consider you the most deadly of sinners if you had some debts to pay."

So saying, Joe retired to the billiard-room, close by the library, where already Mrs. Maria was giving a little sketch of Mr. Crawford's unusual agitation to uncle Molyneux. It was only in answer to his question how the old man was, and it was no ill-feeling towards Crawford which actuated her description.

"If it were not so sad," said Mrs. Maria, "it would be almost droll to see how the old gentleman forgot all about it in having his pillows set to rights, though Charley stood

calling his name, and protesting in his own defence. So solemn one moment and concerned about his son, the next thinking nothing in the world so important as that pillow! I suppose it's what we all must come to, but it would be very droll if it were not very sad."

"So there's something about debts, is there? It's a little late," said uncle Molyneux, somewhat sternly, "for *me* to hear of them. I like things honest and aboveboard. Debts! why he's been seven or eight years at home, the fellow has. Waiting till I was dead, I fancy! By Jove, I've half a mind—but what did Charley say?"

"Oh! denied it all, with a face so inflamed with passion and—and indignation, and amazement, that I scarcely knew him," said Mrs. Maria; "but our poor dear old papa left him no room. He was all for his pillow. Ah! life is a very odd, unaccountable thing."

With which observation she smoothed down an incipient smile at the oddity of this particular scene, sighed, and went into the library for a book. Uncle Molyneux had dropped his newspaper on the floor, but he did not pause to lift it. He crushed the rustling paper under his boot as he rose to stand before the fire and fume in private wrath.

"By Jove! to have debts eight or ten years old and never let me know; waiting till I was dead, to be sure!" he exclaimed, reddening with fury.

Joe entered the room as the words were said.

"It's only some unaccountable crotchet of my poor old father's," said the good-natured heir, coming up to him with some anxiety for his brother. "There doesn't seem the slightest foundation for it, that I can see. Charley is furious. It's only a sick man's delusion: he's a deal too prudent a fellow, is Charley, to put himself in anybody's power."

"That's true, at least," owned uncle Molyneux, letting off his passion in a little puff which eased its excess and calmed his heat.

"And, at all events," added Joe, gravely, "we had better wait a little—things still more serious are upon us now."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE first thing which Crawford did, naturally, was to hasten up to his wife to make inquiries, and to ascertain from her all that she knew, little as it was.

"Of course you thought it quite unnecessary to make any inquiries, to sound Gerty, as to how much she knew, or to find out how far matters had gone—you, whose confounded weakness alone put the affair beyond redemption!" cried the infuriated husband. "Of course you never thought of it? it didn't occur to you: why the devil didn't it occur to you? Here is ruin looming upon us—total ruin; and you sit simpering over your baby, and contemplate your husband's destruction, as if it was nothing in the world to you."

"Charles," said the poor little woman, trembling involuntarily, "*I* heard nothing of it, and it seemed safest to make no inquiries: what could I say? Oh, Charles, if it was found out, I am ready to say it was my fault—my fault repented of every hour of every day. I was so young, I had never learned to think for myself—my dreadful, guilty, unforgivable weakness. I know it, Charles; but oh, if it were found out would it not take a load from your heart?"

He stood up before her with the face of an evil spirit as she spoke,—pale, black with passion, seeing in her not his wife nor the mother of his boys, but a weak creature who longed to confess her sin, and who could ruin him by a word.

"Have a care," he cried, with breathless rage, which denied him words. "Have a care! I am not a man to sell myself for my wife's caprices; a word, a breath, a whisper, will be enough for me. Take the load off your heart—give it over to Gerty's keeping, or Madge's, or some other confidante; but, remember, you shall awake next morning with no children; no, not the baby at your bosom, not even that white-faced child from whom your vapors and repinings have sucked the health and strength. If I bear the punishment for your folly, you at least shall not go free!"

Amv answered nothing ; she gazed pitifully in the face of that infant which lay on her knee: it was his inferences, those secondary malicious suggestions of passion, which killed this poor mother. Was it her fault that of all the children born in these years this delicate blossom alone remained to her ? was it by her selfish melancholy that the wholesome blood had been drained from that baby cheek ? She did not resist the accusation. Once more her husband's words went down like a stone to her poor discouraged heart. Aprile was lost in the vast world, and it was her own unmotherly weakness which sacrificed *that* child ; the others were dead, and it was her repinings that had killed them. God help her ! and here lay this baby hardly saved out of the grave which had swallowed up the rest, perhaps ordained to bear throughout its suffering life the penalty of its mother's sin. She bent down over it to hide her trembling, and kissed with lips that quivered that little dear white face. She was not afraid of his threat ; it was so impossible that *she* could betray their secret that she was not afraid of anything he could do or threaten ; but she *was* stricken to the soul with this thought.

Her husband stood before her, looking at her, in an ignorance as complete as if he had never seen her till this moment. He saw her paleness, her involuntary trembling, and the quivering touch of her lips upon her baby's face. Save as the malicious sport of the moment his own suggestion was nothing to him. When it had once been uttered, it was forgotten, and nothing could have astonished him more than to know what a poisoned arrow he had sent into this poor woman's heart. But he did think she was frightened. He believed that in imagination she saw herself childless and forsaken, and that the idea stunned her beyond power of speech, and he was satisfied with the impression he had produced.

"You understand me," he repeated. "I do not make vain threats: a word, a hint, such as I mention, and you shall be alone. There is no need for anything further ; I see you comprehend fully all that I would say."

And he left her, confident in having cured *her*, at least, of any inclination to confess—left her in her woeful new channel of *thought*, pondering over her child. She was only a

mother, nothing more. Had she been happy and prosperous, that character and that alone would still have been her grand distinction. The wifely part of her nature had never had a chance of anything but the most imperfect development. She honored her husband, obeyed him, supposed she loved him—never certainly entered into any discussion with herself upon this matter, but took it for granted, as it is sometimes the safest way to do; but brooded over her children with her entire heart: was it she who had weakened this suffering infant, and had she been the slow and gradual murderess of the children dead?

Thus she asked herself, sitting alone up stairs with her baby, hearing in the room adjoining—a room as far removed from that of their grandfather as the dimensions of the house would allow, and to which the children were almost confined during this melancholy time—the sports of Edward and Charley. “Baby” was very quiet all that long afternoon—sadly quiet the delicate child always was—requiring no extraordinary efforts for his amusement as the other happy boys had done, and the poor mother sat over him, thinking how it was she who had weakened the springs of his life.

These days went past with an extraordinary silent speed which it is impossible to describe. To Gertrude and Madge, who relieved each other in the sick-room, there seemed a constant call of everybody else to meals, which made their hearts sick. Then the whole family were sometimes called together suddenly, sometimes summoned from table or roused in the middle of the night by a sudden alarm of the young watchers, who were not sufficiently acquainted with death to know the signs of his inevitable approach, and who over and over again believed the last moment had come, while still it was but slowly coming in the leisure and nature of Providence. On such occasions, when half alarmed and half doubtful, the family trooped silently into the old man's chamber, the servants gathered outside the door in distant half-visible clusters, some of the women crying, some only preparing to cry, whispering together, the elder of their experiences, the younger of their fears, starting at every sound, and waiting with a profoundly dramatic and excited human expectation,

to hear of the event—that event more thrilling and impressive than the conclusion of any other drama—to which they had all looked forward so long, and every threatening of which was now attended by a certain kind of hope, the strange hope of tired interest, excitement too long prolonged, and a natural human impatience for novelty of circumstance which one sees so often move spectators, who are interested only by general considerations, and have no special concern of the affections in an approaching death.

About a week after Christmas that often-repeated summons came with authority. It was the doctor himself who proclaimed the coming of the last hour. They all went into the room where the two daughters had held their places all day, one at either side of the bed. Joe and his wife, Charles and his wife, the father holding little Edward's hand tightly in his, half to encourage the boy, and half to sustain himself, while Amy led her fair-haired Charley, who was frightened, and fain to hide his face on her arm; uncle Molyneux followed last of all, placing himself at the foot of the bed, and gazing on the sufferer with all that blunted interest and quickened curiosity conveyed by the fact that he himself was only some three or four years younger than the dying man. Griffiths, who was sadly bowed within the last few days, partly with sympathy and partly with self-regard, waited behind Gertrude ready for anything that had to be done. The house-keeper's portly presence appeared at the door, just within it, and before it was closed by the soft town butler, who waited with his hand upon the lock, and his solemn black suit looking like the occasion, to announce when all was over. A little faint, indistinct hum betrayed the presence of the watchers without.

Mr. Crawford was not a different man, as he lay there upon his death-bed; he was the same in that strange undisturbable identity of human nature to his last moment; greatly spent and solemnized in his wan ghastly face, but in himself unchanged. He looked up at Mr. Molyneux, as he stood broad and full, in all his big proportions and manifest health, at the foot of the bed, with a strange gleam of wonder and appeal in his face.

"He's no more than three or four years younger than I,"

said the old man, too feeble to indicate whom he meant even by a finger, but fixing his dying eyes upon the undiminished strength of the other. They all bent forward, as if to some weighty utterance, to hear these indistinct words, strange death-bed sayings, so sadly significant and natural. Then came that deep unbroken silence of a death-room, with the one audible breath laboring, struggling, so soon to struggle and labor no more for ever. Then he looked round him hazily, with his darkening eyes, and this time his gaze lighted on his son Charles, and the boy whom he held so tightly by the hand.

"Ah," said the old man, with a sudden loud expiration of his difficult breathing which startled them all with the idea that this was his last gasp, "you've got boys of your own, Charley; *get them paid.*"

Charles held fast his boy's hand; he could scarcely restrain a momentary cry out of his heart, half of vain appeal against that unchangeable conclusion, half of a mere human entreaty, unconsidered and spontaneous, for other words more fit for a father's death-bed.

Then there was another interval; the old man grew uneasy and troubled; he looked round and round him, piercing into the gathering shadows with his dim eyes.

"The parson!" he said at last, with a gasp: "they are all here besides, but not he. Where is he, Gerty? where is he?" he added, with a shrill rising of his voice. "Send for him! Ah, I'll be asleep before he comes; something—there was something. Will no one tell me what it was he said?"

Everybody came closer with an instinctive movement; nobody spoke.

The agitation continued, increased, but only for a few minutes.

"Ah, Gerty! I'll be asleep before he comes, and I'll—I'll—I'll not want to know when I wake," stammered the old man; "Good—good night to you all—and—God bless you and the children. Another time I'll tell you all the rest."

These were the last words he spoke to them in this world. The other time in which he should tell them all the rest, came close to them with a momentary, indescribable thrill and

pang only a few minutes after, when the aged eyes opened wide never to be closed again by any effort of their own, and the father of the house was dead.

He was dead; the old world was ended; the new rule and the new times had begun. All was over; the long-expected event had happened at last; the one sole interest of these past days had received its conclusion; and while the two young women who had nursed the sufferer, the only real mourners, slept the deep sleep of grief and exhaustion, already the new current and tide of life had commenced. Joe, honestly sorry for his father, could not help intrusive thoughts of various matters which had long slumbered in his mind against the time when he should be master of Rookley. Mrs. Maria, not without some considerations of her own of the same kind, could not avoid thinking what effect this might have upon Gerty, and what, save her period of mourning, was now to hinder her marriage. Charles had his own thoughts of miserable anxiety, heavier and bitterer than any of the others; the servants were all astir with speculations, varying from the quality and fashion of their new mourning, to the chances of their retaining or not retaining their places, and, on the part of the elder ones, to hopes of legacies and annuities. One was at rest and all the rest were liberated. It is the common course of death and of life.

"Charley," said Joe, to his brother, during the interval which still elapsed before the house was opened, and the family appeared once more, "you'll not forget what my father said. If you should have any old debts you want to get rid of, speak out, there's a good fellow. I'm not the man to blame you, you know; and, as far as my ability goes, you know also, I'll help you out."

"Thank you," said the younger brother, with some heat; "but I have told you before, Joe, that the whole affair is a delusion; that I want no help, and I'm only sorry my father came to his end as he did, with an idea so mortifying to me in his mind. I assure you I have no thanks to give to the person who put it there."

"You mean Gerty. Gerty never raised a prejudice against *any one*; it is quite contrary to her nature," said Joe; "but

of course you know your own concerns best, and I've said my say."

Uncle Molyneux was not so easily shaken off.

"I want to know what your father meant. I want to know what this is," he said, rather abruptly, to his heir. "Of course, as is to be expected, the person most concerned knows least of the matter. I tell you, Charley, I must be satisfied. What are these debts?"

"A simple delusion, sir," said the member for Fantwich, hiding a passion which seemed to scorch him, under an annoyed but smiling expression, and with a native Jesuitry turning his thoughts upon the lost child and not upon the "debts of honor" which he had owed all these years to the Hesse "bank."

"Eh? how?—what do you mean?" stammered uncle Molyneux.

"I will tell you the entire story, sir," said Crawford, with the frankest candor. "You are aware that we lost our first child abroad."

"What the deuce has that to do with your debts, eh?—a little girl? Ah, to be sure, yes!" said uncle Molyneux, who could not understand why so purely unimportant a matter should be introduced here.

"My wife was in the greatest distress and I hurried her away; she had a brain-fever: she never was strong either in mind or body," said Crawford. "The doctor who attended her blamed me for what he was pleased to call a cruel kindness, and chanced to tell Gertrude this tale of what happened eight or nine years ago, when she was at Willesham in summer. Gerty attacked myself on the subject. I, knowing how far the facts were the reverse, and resenting, as every man does, any interference between himself and his wife, got angry, as was natural, though very absurd, to be sure. I said, I think, that to accuse me of unkindness to Amy, was an attempt to dishonor and discredit me. My boy Edward heard the words, and told his grandfather that his aunt Gerty had accused me of something dishonorable. That expression took possession of the old man's mind, uncle," concluded Crawford, who had been speaking rather fast, as a man has a right to do

in narrating facts which nobody can combat. "His mind was weakened, as you have seen; he brooded over the words, did not know what to make of it, and at last in his own fancy, without knowing anything about the matter, concluded it must be debt. That is the entire story. It has distressed me; for one does not like to see one's father go out of the world with a false impression of one's character; but these are the plain facts."

Uncle Molyneux went over the story with a sceptical and unwilling conviction. It *was* fact, so far as it went—the culprit was strong in the knowledge, and the listener could not refuse to believe it. He gave in, though still with a degree of offence and suspicion greater than Crawford had seen before in his indulgent relative, and not very comforting to himself; but he did give in at last. Was the danger over? If it was, the burden was certainly not yet lifted from the sinner's heart.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Six months afterwards Rookley had recovered all its bright aspect of life: the family to be sure were in mourning, and festivities were impracticable; but extreme grief certainly did not contradict the aspect of that brilliant summer. Gertrude was dethroned, and had yielded up her sceptre gracefully; but she was still in her brother's house, and showed that she could submit to be less than the first, and to acknowledge the legitimate empire of another, a fact which Mrs. Maria had scarcely believed possible. And by this time the question of a long engagement was no longer within the range of questions discussable. Gertrude was to be married as soon as her mourning permitted. Her preparations, which were simple enough, were going on now. She was subdued, for her father was dead, and her grief, if it was not excessive, was real, and *she was* subdued too, because she had transferred her heart

and greatest interest, and was no longer her own first person, but looked to another for the great springs and impulses of life; but perhaps she was happier than she ever had been all her days before, looking forward with courageous eyes to that brick parsonage, rejoicing to think of the help and the consolation which she alone could render, and subliming with her heroic ideal fancy all the realities which might have been called contracted, and all the details which Fielding admitted to be vulgar. But their prospects were still no greater than before: all the settlements that were possible were the settling of Gertrude's fortune upon herself, and still only the forty pounds a year, and the interest of the two thousand pounds which was Fielding's own patrimony, remained for the young couple to begin their life. They were not discouraged, though the affair was beyond pity, beyond sympathy, and admitted nothing but horror and dismay on the part of their too kind friends, who undertook to think for them: they, thinking for themselves, were not dismayed.

About this time it happened that a committee of the House of Commons sat upon a special subject connected with the poor of London. The member for Fantwich, whose well-known interest in every philanthropical social movement of course suggested him to its proposer as a proper person to assist in this inquiry, was on the committee; and Mr. Fielding, of St. Abraham's, Bethnal Green, whose Herculean labors were so renowned, and whose knowledge was so unquestionable, was, equally of course, one of the witnesses examined. Among the number of the discerning public who read the report of this committee's labors, which a dearth of more exciting news, and "the importance of the subject" produced in the newspapers every day, and observed the special acridity with which the member for Fantwich cross-examined the Bethnal-Green incumbent, was a great Yorkshire squire in town for the season, who was a man of some enlightenment, much love of fair-play, and a determined disinclination to see anybody bullied. This gentleman had a living in his gift, a vacant living, a living of twelve hundred a year, and fifteen thousand souls, in one of the most populous, busy, and wicked localities of the great northern county. He had neither son

nor nephew to put into it, and was resolute to give it to nobody who had ever asked, or even implied a desire, for the prize. In three months, if he did not make up his mind, the presentation fell to the hands of the Chapter of York, who were not likely to lose much time in availing themselves of their privilege; consequently our squire, who piqued himself on his own judgment, kept his eyes about him and was very much alive to the merits and demerits of everything in the shape of clergymen which crossed his path. He had seen the name of Fielding before now, and heard people speak of him; and when he stood by, like all England, to see a man, whose unquestionable labors had been complimented in the highest terms by the chairman of the committee, bullied by the member for Fantwich, indignation overcame the Yorkshireman. He read such a bit of conversation as this, and his spirit was stirred within him.

"*Mr. C.*—The result of your experience is, that private charities and visitations are more effectual among the poor than public aid; that, in short, it is better to teach them to depend on precarious and fantastic personal benevolence, with all the servility it produces, than upon the assistance of the nation to which they have a right?

"*Mr. F.*—I beg your pardon; I must have expressed myself very badly, to have left any such impression on the mind of the committee. What I stated as the result of my experience is this: that the greatest real benefit which can be done to a poor man is to teach him to depend on himself; that I think public aid almost invariably debasing to a man who has strength to work for himself; that a right to public aid is the most degrading of all props; and that the necessities of the able-bodied laboring classes, the exigencies of their 'slack' times and failures of work, are not to be met by workhouses and public grants. Every man, however, has a certain 'right,' if he is about to stumble, to the helping hand of his neighbor, whoever that may happen to be.

"*Mr. C.*—I am afraid that is a very vague and impracticable doctrine; and where would you limit the class of poor men who have a right to that helping hand? I fear this Utopian idea would enlarge indefinitely but enormously the

pauper class. We have been talking of men who earn so many shillings a week; but your principle would apply equally to those in receipt of a few hundreds a year. Where should you draw your boundary; perhaps at two hundred pounds.

"*Mr. F.*—That is precisely my own income; but I beg to say that my principles are entirely against alms, except in the extremest circumstances. A man of two hundred or two thousand a year may be as much a pauper as a man who has only fifteen shillings a week. The entire spirit of any work I have ever done has been to discourage pauperism, and not to extend it.

"*Mr. C.*—So we have already had the pleasure of hearing; but, notwithstanding, you will assert the right of your stipendiary of two hundred a year to 'the helping hand.'

"*Mr. F.*—Certainly; the right belongs to every human creature, from a peasant to a prime minister. It is not a question of income."

Here other members of the committee interposed, the conversation having strayed from its legitimate subject, which was the social condition of the London poor.

"I tell you what," cried the Yorkshire squire, tossing the paper on the table of the club library with the air of a man who has found out a secret, "these men have some private knowledge of each other, and there's a grudge somewhere. I hate a bully! Not a lawyer even, that man at Fantwich isn't. I know the place; a pocket borough of my Lord Bagillt! his own son was in for it before this Crawford. What the deuce right has he to bully the parson?—a fine fellow, I'll swear—I've a great mind to look him up."

"Committee on the London poor—Crawford, Fielding—ah, I'll tell you the secret of that," said the same spruce old parliamentary gentleman who had dined with Everard at Hertford-street. "Met the clergyman once at old Crawford's—vastly clever fellow, but crotchety—but he wants to marry Charley Crawford's sister; that's the rub."

The squire opened his eyes a little.

"Crawford of Rookley—good family—isn't there a great beauty among them?" he said.

"Ah, there's the sore point," cried his informant, with a

little additional chuckle. "Not much wonder if he's savage, is it? It's she——"

"And who's the parson?" asked the squire. "Any way belonging to the Denbigh family, eh?"

But his informant shook his head, and could not tell. Mr. Hawarden thought it over all that day. Speaking of this committee, which everybody knew something of, he managed to pick up some further information about Fielding, and the idea pleased him more and more. A double-first at Oxford, and one of the most distinguished men at his college; a wonderful preacher, a man who had sounded his war-trumpet of good against evil in that far-away corner of London so unmistakeably, that people had heard of it in the clubs, though parsons and parish work were by no means romantically appreciated there; a fellow who had won a great beauty to the full intention of marrying him upon two hundred a year; a man of such varied accomplishments was certainly worth looking after, and there was no telling what he might do among the mills and crowded villages of Hawarden Vale. Next morning the Yorkshireman dropped into a hansom, and ordered himself to be driven to Bethnal Green, a locality which, of course, none of his own servants deigned to be acquainted with. After he had been driven half crazy by an hour and a half's perambulation amongst countless labyrinths of streets, he was set down before the red-brick house where the parson lived and labored.

It was not a very prepossessing house, this future home of Gertrude the magnificent. It opened from a shabby little street, one of the best to be sure in the locality, with little shells of gray brick houses, two and three stories high, with bits of garden plots before them on one side, and the long blank wall of a great manufactory on the other. The little houses were woefully shabby in a marvellous attempt at gentility; with white curtains, knitted and crocheted work being the highest fashion of the district at the parlor windows; and sometimes an ornamental card of "furnished apartments" hung in a centre pane; here and there a dusty London vine festooning the walls, and great sunflowers and dahlias in beds edged with oyster-shells embellishing the little gardens, which,

however, a little straggly seedy mignonette and some other hardy fragrant flowers still made sweet. It would be a strange scene for Gerty if she came here, where, in her warmest hope and full expectation, she meant and trusted to come. Mr. Hawarden did not know Gerty, but even he thought there must be some motive rather out of ordinary worldly calculations which could bring a distinguished scholar and a great beauty together there.

The Yorkshireman was ushered into a square room of moderate size, shelved all round for books, and well furnished so far as they were concerned, where Everard sat by his study table hard at work. He had a long strip of paper before him, scribbled over with memoranda, though whether of the engagements of the day, or notes for a sermon, or statistics for the House of Commons' committee, it was difficult to tell. A number of letters lay before him on the table, letters of every size and shape, of every gradation of bad writing and incomprehensible grammar. Half the people in Bethnal Green, male, female, and juvenile, wanted "situations" of one kind or another; the parson could have filled a palace with servants, established a colony, crammed an emigrant ship, or filled up the ranks of a broken regiment in a day. The hosts of errand boys he had at instant command were beyond any possible calculation, and the younger fry of infant schools, and national schools, and Sunday schools, and district classes, all swarming up in their turn incipient errand boys and maid-servants, was something appalling to contemplate. Besides these letters, there were not many papers on the parson's table; he was not very fond of the reports which a thriving young man's society nursed by a curate, afflicted him withal, and preferred to give up his evenings to hear what all his Scripture readers and visitors were about rather than to teach these humble emissaries, whose piety by no means implied the gifts of literature or special endowments of modesty and good taste, to make themselves absurd on paper, and throw a shadow of inevitable ridicule even in his own mind over their good works. He was writing at full speed in a hand not very elegant nor legible, with a slight flush on his face, and a slight swell and expansion of his person; he was going to preach out of doors that even-

ing, having something to say to the evening idlers, who were not accessible at any other time. He was going in upon them, not with moralities or denunciations, but with his big grand generous Gospel, and his manful human heart. If it did not thrill into some of those rude loungers this night, that they were mere coalheavers and costermongers, that strange within them throbbed an accountable heart, and a life that should yet answer for itself before august assembled worlds—it was a fortune more extraordinary than had ever happened to the preacher yet. He rose with a momentary impatience when his unknown visitor entered, the cadence and the rhythm of his words swelling in him, in a manner unintelligible, but somewhat extraordinary to the stranger, and it was not without the cloud of an instant, a momentary shade of vexed disappointment, that he perceived the interruption which was now certain, for Mr. Hawarden, no ways doubtful of his reception, sat down with the air of a man who meant to have his say out, and would be in no haste afterwards to go away.

Mr. Hawarden, however, was by no means prepared for the reception which his proposal met with. The first result was a gleam of sudden light upon Fielding's face, the shining of that special smile which belonged as exclusively to Gertrude as her own smiles or tears, and which came involuntarily over the countenance which at that moment was not turned towards the visitor, then a few words of frank and honest acknowledgement, so rapid, full, and cordial that the squire, who certainly had looked for gratitude, but not after this fashion, was embarrassed and half ashamed of himself. But Mr. Hawarden found to his amazement that this by no means concluded the matter; the thanks for the personal compliment conveyed in the offer were immediate, hearty, and explicit, but only then the discussion began. The astonished squire, so far from being taken at his word, was put back into descriptions and statistics before he knew what he was about. The parson bowed when the twelve hundred a year was the matter under mention, but the parson's curiosity about Hawarden Vale was extensive and particular. He wanted to know a great deal more than the squire could tell him; he required information totally beyond the other's

power of bestowal; he subjected the Yorkshireman to a harder examination than he had met with since his college days, an examination which was certainly flattering to his local vanity, but extremely puzzling to his judgment. He asked himself a thousand times "what does the fellow mean?" He slid out of the hard questions put to him into animated little digressions about the excellent society of the neighborhood, the beauty of the locality, the picturesque and pretty rectory, but was perpetually dragged back to the mills and the workmen, and the population,—things very much less in his way.

"But I do not understand," cried the troubled squire, when he had been led into great magnification of all the social advantages of the place, by way of urging it upon his incomprehensible parson—a thing which he would have scorned the idea of when he entered. "Do you mean to accept the offer I make you, or what is your conclusion to be?"

"Don't think me indifferent to the personal compliment you pay me," said Fielding, looking up suddenly; "I trust I have expressed my thanks for *that* as I feel it; the other is a question less easily settled. If I see that I can do my duty in Hawarden Vale—if I can arrange to leave this place as I ought to leave it—I shall be glad to accept your offer. Pardon me if I hesitate: a clergyman is very much like a soldier; I can't say to you at once I will go to your post and leave my own exposed position under fire. It will be greatly for my happiness, greatly for my comfort if I can accept, but it must be consistent with my duty too."

"There is twelve hundred a year," said, without quite knowing what he said, the bewildered squire.

"I can live upon forty," said Fielding, with a smile.

Mr. Hawarden looked up at him with total amazement and incomprehension. *He* gave his butler a good deal more; but the parson was neither ashamed nor boastful. The squire said "Ah!" with a quaver in his voice. This was not a poor curate nor a famished priest. He was young, triumphant, talked of; a rising man in the full glory and strength of life, about to marry a great beauty. No wonder Mr. Hawarden's voice quavered, and his amazement could only utter "Ah!"

But certainly it was not to be supposed that even the income of Hawarden Rectory was an irresistible temptation to the fabulous and extraordinary man who could live upon forty pounds a year.

The conference ended thus, not with perfect satisfaction to the squire. He re-entered his hansom, not the gratified flattered man he had expected, with his new parson secured, the trouble of his ecclesiastical patronage over, and the satisfactory sensation of having made another man happy in his mind; but somewhat anxious and a little doubtful, while more than ever convinced that this was certainly the very man for Hawarden, and disposed to put himself even to a good deal of trouble by way of securing him. Everard, for his part, had various additions to make to his programme of the day, which had been full enough before; he had no intention of dallying in the settlement of this question. If it could be done, it should be done, and it is not surprising if a little human gratification in the realization of his prophecy, and a thrill of pride at the thought that Gertrude, after all, should not be so dismally ill off as was anticipated, mingled at once with the doubt and the gratitude in his heart.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHEN Mr. Fielding had attended to those first pieces of business which were urgent and unpostponable, he set out, at an enormous pace—he who never stopped to set down passengers, nor diverged out of the straightest road for any dainty obstacle, was good to outspeed an omnibus, and cabs do not come within the limits of forty pounds a year—to call upon the vicar of his parish. The vicar of such a parish is a small bishop in his way. Great amid the cluster of district churches rising round him, was the vicar of Bethnal Green, not much of a laborious man in his own person, a man whom no circumstance either of human love or

religious devotion could have enabled to live upon forty pounds a year, but an extremely proper clergyman, whose church was crammed every Sunday morning by all the gentry of the locality, to be enlivened for the rest of the day only by the scanty presence of some score of people, and who was understood to manage his parish with great discretion, and was neither high, nor low, nor broad—if the Broad Church was invented by that time, a fact of which we cannot be certain—but a very respectable parson and excellent man of the world.

To this excellent clergyman Mr. Fielding hastened when his own indispensable duties were over. The presentation to the incumbency of St. Abraham's was in the joint hands of the bishop of the diocese and the vicar of the parish. Under these circumstances the vicar's vote was probably the most important and influential of the two, for of course his Reverend Grace of London was not expected to know the wants of that little sub-diocese like its own immediate head, and the two hundred a year which endowed the district church were not too tempting to general ambition. Fielding was bent upon the settlement of his own personal doubts as regarded his acceptance or rejection of Hawarden, and he went to the point at once.

It was Friday and the vicar was busy with his weekly sermon—so that in the first place he was certain to be found at home, if he should chance to be less gracious than usual for being interrupted. The incumbent of St. Abraham's laid his case before his ecclesiastical head with the greatest brevity and distinctness. He had been offered a living in Yorkshire which he should like to accept. Would Dr. Stephens extend his patronage to the good curate who had helped so manfully to work the district, and make Mr. Roberts incumbent of St. Abraham's? That he was the best man possible for the place there could be no dispute. The doctor stopped himself in the inquiries and congratulations concerning Hawarden, which flowed from his bland lips together, to shake his head, and look a hundred doubtful meanings. The best man for the place—ah, that might be, but other considerations remained still.

“My dear Fielding, I thought you had heard me express my sentiments on that subject,” said the vicar. “Roberts is an

excellent man and most deserving, but—you are aware that is a debt on the church.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Fielding. He had not a debt of his own so far as any one ever heard, but he certainly showed a culpable indifference to the burden upon that brick edifice. He went on poisoning a paper-knife upon his finger as if that branch of the subject was rather indifferent to him, and once more the vicar shook his head.

“My impression is,” said that dignified personage, of some importance, “that the advowson ought to be sold to pay the debt on the church. I have said so to the bishop, of course everybody was aware that *you* could not run so long where you were, and his Grace, I am glad to say, perfectly agrees with me. We can do nothing with churches which have debt upon them, especially in such districts. I should be glad to serve *you*, and would very willingly use to your friend; but, my dear sir, it is not possible. The subject quite made up my mind upon the subject. The advowson must be sold.”

“And the bishop agrees with you?” said Fielding.

“The bishop agrees with me,” said the vicar with a smile. “His lordship knows that an encumbered church is a bad thing for a poor district; indeed, his own ideas, like mine, are rather against this multiplication of churches until duties are obtained to pay for them. But, my dear Fielding, you have done your duty admirably in St. Abraham’s; *that* everybody must allow. Bless me, I had almost forgotten you *were* complimented the other day in the Common Council—quite an ovation! Nobody in the world can shirk that any responsibility, either for your church or your district, remains upon *you*; you’ve done your duty by them, I am sure. Hawarden is a very good benefice, if I recollect rightly. I wish you joy with all my heart, especially under present circumstances, as I understand,—eh?”

“Especially under present circumstances,” said the vicar with a smile. “But let us finish the other subject. What is your debt your sole objection to present Roberts? is that an obstacle in his way?”

“My dear fellow, you are strangely careless about

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

willing to give between two and three thousand pounds to church objects, ay, or a woman either, likes to give it, let me assure you, in a more showy way than by paying off a debt on an individual church; and as for getting up a subscription, that's hopeless, after the place is built. Well, well, yes. I'll satisfy you: if any one will pay the debt (which I think, privately, as unlikely as the rebuilding of my steeple), I'll give my entire support to Roberts, and recommend him to the bishop. I think I may say I am certain, under such circumstances, that his Grace would not hesitate to confirm my choice. There, are you content?"

"Perfectly content, thank you, and good morning. I have detained you too long already," said Fielding, rising from his chair.

"Delighted to see you always," said the complaisant vicar, shaking his hand heartily: "highly pleased with your appearance before the committee too, Fielding; but don't be foolish, my dear fellow—don't throw away your own prospects for any crotchet of duty about St. Abraham's. You'll *never* get that money; it's quite a hopeless undertaking; and you certainly have done your duty to your people already in a way quite beyond any praise of mine. Now listen to me, my dear Fielding," added the vicar, detaining the hand he held and growing fatherly and tender, "don't throw away your own prospects. What's the value now of this living of Hawarden?"

"Twelve hundred a year."

"Twelve hundred a year!!" cried the vicar, with two distinct notes of admiration. "In *your* circumstances! You don't suppose I have not heard of the beautiful Miss Crawford. My dear boy, don't be over-scrupulous; I entreat you think of yourself!"

"Thank you, I shall; all is right now. I am infinitely obliged to you, Doctor. I shall accept Hawarden and you shall keep your word," cried Fielding, with an incipient shout of triumph and victory in his voice. The chances were he was thinking a good deal, if not of himself, at least of that same beautiful Miss Crawford, and already building tabernacles of glory about Gerty the magnificent in that unknown rectory. He went away as a man goes who has got his heart's

desire and receives it with all his heart. One or two such epic climaxes of joy are in everybody's life; but we enjoy them, doubtless, only according to our dimensions, and never have more happiness or triumph, as we never have more misery, than we can contain. Perhaps the sorrow comes by years and the joy by moments: never mind. Sorrow scarcely ever filled a man with such a fulness as that intoxicating instant filled Everard Fielding's great big heart. He went out treading upon air, in an involuntary and delicious elation which he felt no need either to restrain or be compunctious about. Happiness did not come amiss to his religion; he went carrying his head high under the sympathetic heavens where the sun—for which Holy Writ has found only such images, a bridegroom and a strong man—rejoiced to run his race, as did he.

There was not sufficient time to-day, considering his out-of-door engagements, to go to Rookley, and at present he was bound for a lawyer's office in the City. A quiet little place in a little square withdrawn only by some dozen steps from one of the busiest mercantile streets, where, under the shadow of a church of Wren's, or one of Wren's immediate successors, and a line of three or four sunburnt and half-grown trees, a respectable solicitor in very quiet private business, the third or fourth in hereditary descent, had his quiet office and his old-fashioned house. It was such a place as is to be found only in London; perhaps after another generation not even to be found in that most hermit breeding of great cities; for Mr. Fielding's solicitor had no son to succeed *him* and keep up the silent, faded, respectable orthodoxy of the place, where you could only hear a hum of the noise which was in reality so near at hand, and where silent flickers of leaf and light moved upon the old carpet as they might do even in that Hawarden Rectory, where Everard built the bower of his hopes.

Mr. Tempest was at home, and was by no means surprised to see his present visitor, for the marriage settlement, which could no more than secure to Gertrude her own little fortune, was in progress, and got on slowly like every other matter with which the law has to do; but the lawyer *was* startled by

the first words addressed to him: "Mr. Tempest, I want some money," said Fielding, the instant he was within the sacred door of that private room.

"Yes?" said Mr. Tempest, interrogatively. Then he made a pause and shook his head and looked melancholy, as people generally do when they allude to that subject. Fatal statement! enough to separate brother from brother and alienate the warmest friends.

"Wants to furnish his house, of course," said the lawyer to himself: "very natural, but a bad beginning. Well, Mr. Fielding," he said aloud, with the air of a man who has endured something and got over it, and is ready to put a brave face upon the matter. "I'd rather you consulted me about anything else; but I am not surprised. Let me hear what it is."

"I want to get possession of my own large fortune in the funds, and I want something very near a thousand pounds more," said Fielding; "after which I want you to communicate with Messrs. Vellum and Foreclose, in Chancery Lane, about a mortgage upon my church, St. Abraham's. I want the money paid off."

Mr. Tempest stared with open eyes at his extraordinary client. He was ready to exclaim, "Much learning hath made thee mad." Nothing could be more unlike madness than the victorious countenance of Everard. The lawyer essayed to speak, and could not. A man who was going to be married! a man who had nothing better than cane-bottomed chairs in his brick parsonage, and who was about to marry a great beauty and woman of fashion! A thousand pounds for velvet and buhl, fine carpets and fine curtains, was comprehensible in the state of affairs; but at such a crisis to imagine a man using every penny he had, and a thousand pounds more, to pay a debt upon a church! The magnitude of the folly took away the lawyer's breath.

"You don't understand me," said Everard. "I have the offer of another living, and my vicar declines to recommend Roberts—you know Roberts—for St. Abraham's, unless some one will pay off the debt. So of course I have no alternative. *It is unpleasant to owe anybody a thousand pounds, but if*

you only can get it for me, there's twelve hundred a year at Hawarden, and we can pay it say in two years."

"I wish you joy heartily," cried the other, half pleased and half provoked; "but, my dear Mr. Fielding, what have you to do with Mr. Roberts? What is St. Abraham's, now that you have attained a more suitable position, to you? everybody must have seen you could not remain *there*. This money is just half as much again as every penny you possess in the world. What is St. Abraham's to you?"

"That is my concern," said Fielding, gravely. "Do you think it will be so extremely difficult to get the money?"

"I did not say so," said Mr. Tempest. "I only felt it my duty to represent to you—you a man about to marry, a man who will have children to provide for. My dear sir, you have no idea how troublesome these things are: you will never get your money back; you will find perpetual failures of interest; nobody will be grateful. You had very much better let matters stand as they are. It is exactly half as much again as the little money you have; and really, for such an object, to leave yourself a thousand pounds in debt! What will your future relatives—what would any one say?"

"What they please, I fear," said Fielding; "and it is to be hoped the affair will be forgotten, before my children, as you say, have sufficient gift of speech to criticize it. Why do you remonstrate? I want to go to Hawarden. I want a clear field and nobody to interfere with me, and a handsome income for my wife. Yes; I *want* all that, now it has been offered to me; but if I accepted it under the condition of having my own cure of souls put up to auction, and sold to any man who could pay for it, what a miserable fellow I should be! No; get me the money if you can; and if not, I'll ask it from a friend."

"You would be doing exactly what everybody else does: are you to be responsible, after you leave it, for the good of that district—that district, where such a man, of course, has been totally thrown away," cried the lawyer, with unusual impatience. "Well, well, keep your temper; I'll get it done for you; but a more absurd piece of Quixotry, begging your pardon——" ●

"Pray don't beg my pardon; have it out. I never recommend any man to keep his temper," cried Fielding, laughing: "it's infinitely better policy to get rid of it. Now remember; it's no change of mortgage, but a simple paying off: I know you understand me. There is neither interest nor repayment in the question. I'm very busy; let me know when the thing is arranged, and I will come and sign whatever is necessary, to be repaid in two years."

"Where then is your new parish; and you are certain it is twelve hundred a year?" asked the lawyer, with a sigh of despair.

"Hawarden in Yorkshire. Yes, I understand so; but there are fifteen thousand souls," said Everard, apologetically, with a momentary shade of seriousness upon his face.

"Oh! go away, for heaven's sake!" cried the old lawyer. "You grudge having a decent income, do you? What do you come here into the city for, to corrupt our morals and lead us astray? There, there, I'll send you word when you're wanted; but I won't trust myself within reach of your example. Go away."

"Ah, gladly; but remember I want to be married, and make haste about it," said Fielding, laughing as he left the office. Then he proceeded back to his work with all the swell and fulness of his joy about him. Grief may be very grand upon occasion, and a nearer neighbor to us all than gladness; but to see a good man very happy, and permitting himself that delight and glory, is a sight for the eyes in heaven.

CHAPTER L.

VERY early next morning, at an hour when all London was asleep, Fielding went down to Rookley. Arriving there before breakfast, in all the glory of a July morning, when everything was as bright and fresh as his own hopes, he found Gerty in a little morning parlor which for a week or two past had been almost appropriated to the bride elect and her maid, that functionary whose services the parson's wife meant to have no further occasion for. The room was not in very famous order; it was littered with heaps of pretty muslin, some glistening silken articles and a background of solid white in the shape of linen. It was a very interesting apartment to the Rookley household. A bride is a bride, howsoever she may be about to bestow herself, and that *trousseau*, which was to be Joe's present, though Mrs. Maria made satirical lamentations over it as fit only for the "wretched poverty" which the ill-advised Gerty was going to, had nevertheless great attractions for the feminine portion of the household. Even Mrs. Apsley, who remained, though the empire was changed, came in with a dignified interest when she could, to admire and sigh over "poor Miss Gertrude's things," and there Gertrude herself spent happy hours at work, glad of the simplicity of the articles round her, and proud of all the complaints that were made over her, and the half-concealed sighs of friendly visitors, who joined Mrs. Maria in the ceaseless wonder,—What would Gerty do when she was a poor parson's wife? Gerty knew very well how she should do, at least she sincerely believed she did, and sat singing and working with the morning sunshine almost reaching her, in that pretty littered room with its one big window through which the midsummer trees, full and glorious, looked in, still aglist with dew, as fair a sight as ever appeared to a lover's eyes; thinking of her life which was approaching, with its labors and thrifts and poverty, as unconscious of the change that had happened on *that* firmament, as that Everard himself

stood by the window, looking at her because he could not help it, because the picture was too much worth looking at to be passed even by *his* haste and eagerness, before he should enter with his lover's greeting, and his wonderful news.

He was not, however, in such haste to tell his news as might have been expected. He had made good his entrance into *that* room where nobody intended he should ever have been permitted to come, and was looking round him with something more even than a woman's interest, and a degree of pride and emotion which these senseless heaps of unformed "material"—things that, after all, when they were made, would at best only be "dress," that vanity of vanities—were of course totally unworthy of. It is a sad blot on his scutcheon, no doubt, but it is sadly true notwithstanding, that no young lady was ever moved to so extreme an interest in the sudden exhibition of a *trousseau*, as at this present moment was Everard Fielding, a clergyman, a scholar, and a man of budding distinction. The sight of Gerty's half-made gowns, which he had no business to see, and which were all adapted for the locality of St. Abraham's, actually put Hawarden Rectory out of his head.

"I know nothing about dress," said Mr. Fielding at last. "Are these very much inferior to what you have been in the habit of wearing, Gertrude?"

"Oh, you think them ugly! It is simply because your taste has not been formed, and you are only in a savage state," cried Gerty. "Come away, you have no right to be here. If you were full of admiration one might endure it, but to talk of inferior! Come along to breakfast, to Maria and Joe."

"It is not time for breakfast, and I am very much satisfied where I am; only something has happened," said Everard, with great seriousness.

"Something has happened! Charley has aggravated you very much, I saw it in the papers, and you have quarrelled with him. It does not matter," said Gertrude very coolly. "I have quarrelled with him a dozen times. So you need not say anything of that to me."

"By-the-by, after all, it is his doing, or partly so," cried Fielding, with a sudden laugh.

"What is his doing?" there *is* something, is there? Something has happened! I wish you would tell me at once what it is," said Gerty. "Something about St. Abraham's, or the social question, or your poor people; but nothing that concerns *us*?"

"Yes," cried Everard, burying himself in the yielding mass of muslin which interposed between himself and his bride, and seizing her amazed out of the midst of it. "Why do you say *us*, and upset my sobriety, and interrupt my story? Yes, Gerty! My wife shall not be the poor parson's wife that all her friends are lamenting over. My princess shall not be lost out of sight in an ugly suburb. Is there any one of them who grudged it so much as I did, or would have glorified my bride like me? Yes, it concerns *us*! I have a different home to offer you now from that parsonage. The one thing which was wanting to me God has sent. My darling, you shall not diminish your glory, nor give up the sweet vanities of your youth, because you are my wife. I was too proud to accept the sacrifice, but I am overjoyed to say you shall make no sacrifice, Gerty. It is all over; we are poor no more."

When he paused, with tears in his eyes and a flush of delight and emotion in his face, Gertrude, half overwhelmed with his breathless words and unusual excitement, laid her hand upon his shoulder to keep him at arm's length, and contemplated him seriously to find out what he meant. She was much astonished at so sudden an onslaught. She did not understand being seized upon with her needle in her hand, and snatched out of her morning industry, her bride-work, to have so sudden an intimation launched at her. Her needle was in her other hand still, and the "breadths" of her unmade dress depended, a streaming length of muslin, from her arm. She stood and looked at him, with that half-authoritative, examining look, which lovers like better than husbands—the look which has a right to know what everything means, and supposes itself sufficiently enlightened to read the face on which it is turned, as no one else can do. But Gertrude did not read it this time. She saw the flush of happiness and triumph, she understood that his heart was touched and overflowing, but she could not make out the cause. "Everard," she said,

with a solemnity all the greater that it was hard to keep off the tears and blushes which came in natural sympathy, "I don't understand you; be sober and respectable, and tell me what it is."

"Ah, but it does not sound what it is, when one is sober and respectable," cried Everard, who did not seem much disposed that way. "It is that I have accepted a wealthy living with a pretty rectory and twelve hundred a year, Gertrude. That is what it is in prose, but that is not what it is in reality. It is—ah, yes, look royal and disapproving—you may! You would rather have tried the poverty. Do not I know it? you would have triumphed over it, as you would triumph over anything, with joy and a conqueror's heart; but as for *me*, Gerty, let me have my victory. I was going to be very happy, to the detriment of my wife; let a man take pleasure in finding that his happiness *may* consist even with his pride!"

"Pride! you have not got any—you don't know what it is!" said Gertrude, yielding for a moment to her own womanish exultation in her lover's qualities; "but you speak of a man? do you forget that you are a clergyman, Everard?" she asked—"severe in youthful virtue"—once more taking her monitorial place.

"Ah, Gertrude! we serve a gracious Master," said Fielding, with the tender gravity which did not misbecome his joy. "It is not He who has set the man and the priest at variance with each other. It is not He who makes human happiness profane. I do not feel that I am less His servant for accepting His blessing, and taking my joy."

Was there any chance for Gerty's lecture? These words made an end of her, and perhaps the infection of that joy had caught, and the happiness in her heart was already quickened in spite of herself; for that or something else had made even Gertrude in her own person weeping ripe.

The news was received in the family with a variety of sympathies. Mrs. Maria, glad enough, it is true, was totally embarrassed and put out of her course, which disappointment took her some time to recover. She was very sharp in her drollery that first day: "If the Prime Minister comes to Bethnal Green to-morrow with a bishopric in his pocket, Mr.

Fielding will not have you, Gerty," she said; "and what is to become of your *trousseau*? I suppose, perhaps she might have a little variety in her literature now, Mr. Fielding, and not confine herself to the cookery book? though why she should have studied the cookery book, when you could not possibly have had anything to eat, is more than I could ever make out. And, Gerty, how about your cotton gowns?"

All this, however, Gertrude bore with the greatest equanimity, all the more that her lover fortified her, and strengthened her soul by letting her know what he had done in respect to that Bethnal Green district which she almost grudged now to have no share in. She was much fortified by these last particulars; they reconciled her to their unlooked-for riches as much as he was reconciled by the fifteen thousand souls.

"And so Charley had a share in it—Charley's ill-temper attracted your Yorkshire squire while we were blushing for him," said Joe. "It is an ill wind that blows nobody good—Charley has lost his temper once more for good, I am afraid, and resumed his uncomfortable moroseness, no one can tell why. He always was an unaccountable fellow, was Charley."

"It has been for good in this case, certainly, if it has brought me twelve hundred a year," said Fielding, loftily.

"Everard!" cried Gerty, "I never believed you cared for money before."

"I don't think I do exactly," said Fielding, laughing; "but I do care, rather, for my wife."

CHAPTER LI.

CHARLES CRAWFORD, M.P. for Fantwich, began the second ten years of his married life in no very comfortable condition. In the first place he was obliged to witness with smiles and a certain degree of apparent complacency the marriage of his sister to Everard Fielding, and to understand—for nobody was disposed to spare him—from Joe and Mrs. Maria, and even from Gerty herself, that his own ill-tempered cross-

examination of "the parson," in the House of Commons committee, had helped the parson to an excellent living, and hastened the marriage; which was not a particularly comforting or agreeable reflection to the honorable member, who had, besides, met with various marks of surprise and disapproval at his evident personal rancor among his fellow committee-men, some of whom apparently did not perceive the naturalness and pleasure of bullying a future brother-in-law in the face of all the world. Crawford, however, was present at the marriage, and made his offering to the bride with the best grace he could assume, but somehow did not feel himself the one most cordially welcomed of the wedding guests. Amy was not well enough to be there, and he was only accompanied by his son Edward, regarding whom a perpetual anxiety and suspicion filled his mind.

As this boy grew and flourished, his father became, if possible, more and more fondly and exclusively attached to him. He was kind enough to the pretty fair-haired Charley, and not more indifferent than was natural to the third and fourth infants since born to him, but it was Edward alone who had ever really touched his heart, and found the one wellspring of love which would flow in that desert. He had, been defiant, he had been afraid of the discovery of his secret before. He had trembled with a selfish dread at the idea of any chance revealing it to uncle Molyneux, and with a silent fury had contemplated that pale partner of his life, through whom or by whom alone he believed it could be betrayed; but a different feeling moved him now. With a degree of anguish inconceivable before he thought of losing the supreme place he held in his child's affections—of ceasing to be the infallible authority and guide to whom Edward looked up with a child's unwavering faith—of meeting disgust, or distrust, or even pity, in those young candid eyes. This thought went to Crawford's heart; it crossed him like a cold shadow at his brightest moments; it interfered with his pleasures; it damped his successes. When he sat down after a successful speech, with the cheers of the House—that highest of plaudits to an English gentleman—ringing in his ears, and the excitement of the occasion still strong upon him,

his face changed, and his heart sank, as though some malicious demon had whispered the suggestion that now, even at this very moment, his boy might be learning with a child's horror and indignation that one blot of his life. He was filled with a perpetual uneasiness in respect to Edward. Sometimes, in a fantastic fit of alarm after seeing some evidence more marked than usual of Amy's affection for her boy, or the confidence subsisting between them, he would carry the child away and keep him in his own chambers in town, till Edward pined for home and his little brothers, and roused his father's apprehensions for his health, and was conveyed back to Willesham as fast as horses could carry him in another variety of anxious alarm and fondness. It was a new development of character altogether in this man of the world. He himself could not understand it, but he could no more overcome or resist than he could account for this new condition of his own mind. Edward was now between nine and ten years old, almost old enough to be sent to school, and, but that his father could not bear the idea of having him at a greater distance and entertained some altogether groundless fears in respect to his health, would have been at Eton by this time. He was in great spirits and triumph at the present crisis, when he alone was his father's chosen companion at Rookley; and some of Mr. Crawford's adversaries would undoubtedly have been softened in their ill opinion had they seen him with the child's hand in his, loving no society so well as that of his son. He was a different man with Edward, and Edward, it would seem, was the appointed instrument of the penalty of guilt which his father had yet to pay; that guilt which almost with his life—with the sacrifice of everything else which he possessed in the world—Charles Crawford would have hidden from his boy.

But if this was a sufficiently fantastic terror—Edward, at his age and with his temper, having many things a thousand times more important to think of than even that conversation about "something dishonorable" which his grandpapa's interest had for a time fastened on his memory—a graver cause for uneasiness remained. Since old Mr. Crawford's death, an unexplainable coldness had risen between uncle Molyneux and his heir. Without any recognized cause for constraint, or

actual quarrel between them, a mist of alienation and distrust had crept over their relations to each other. Their confidential intercourse, their friendship, their habits of intimacy, had suffered a gradual change. Neither of them *would* have explained it; neither were aware of the degrees by which this difference had come about; but it was already quite sufficiently apparent to the household at Molyneux Hall to give occasion for more than one private consultation in the housekeeper's room, when Mr. Molyneux's own man confided his impressions on the subject to the butler and housekeeper, and the latter congratulated herself on never having thought it necessary to lower her own pretensions by any special regard to the tastes of "Mr. Charles." "Blood's one thing and 'doption clean another. Master's a very personal man, and rich enough to take his own pleasure. I wouldn't be surprised, not for my part," said Mrs. Aspinall, "if he was to marry yet."

This idea was not supported by the other members of the secret committee; but they were all agreed that "a many gentlemen, besides Mr. Charles, would be thankful for master's money and Molyneux Hall," a most incontrovertible decision. That which even they perceived and concluded on, had naturally a great and painful effect upon Crawford. If the whole affair had really arisen through some misunderstanding and had been without actual foundation, it would not have occasioned very much serious concern to the heir whose inheritance was thus put in jeopardy; for he had abundant reason already to trust in his relative's honor and sense of justice, and to know that no caprice would affect permanently his own position with Mr. Molyneux. Matters, however, were very different in reality, and the effect of this estrangement was to develop in Crawford all the capricious humors of a desperate man. Sometimes he threw himself into his usual pursuits with an energy so vehement, that applause and success followed his efforts with all the rapidity of a surprised and sudden homage to talents which nobody had understood him to possess; sometimes, the same unsettled restless and unhappy sentiment led him to betray himself by fits of ill-temper and bitterness, such as that which he had

shown to Fielding. And on the whole, though his reputation was higher than ever, it was somewhat changed: his course had become erratic and uncertain; he was no longer a man to be depended upon for the parliamentary occasions of his party; and when that party came into power, the office to which he had been so long looking forward dwindled into so insignificant and unimportant a place that it was not consistent with his dignity to accept it.

These mortifications crowded upon him together when he went to see his sister married. He did go then, partly to show the world and himself that nothing at least had occurred to separate him from his family, and partly with a jealous dread that Gerty might employ even that unlikely time in secret machinations against him, and in a great endeavor to enrich herself and her bridegroom by means of uncle Molyneux. He stood among the bridal crowd at Rookley, with all his guilt, vexation, suspicion—his uneasy restlessness about his own future, and distrust of everybody—staying himself with a forlorn persistence, which in a better man would have been touching and pathetic, upon the love of a child—holding Edward's hand in his and watching over his boy, the worst and hardest dread of all in his troubled horizon being the cold dismal apprehension which went to his heart that, in some time to come, that very child would fail him; that he should some time stand guilty, exposed, humiliated in his son's sight, and lose the sole natural love which had ever thoroughly penetrated his nature; that Edward one day would despise and turn away from the father who adored him; that one refined and delicate touch of agony put a soul into the vulgarer tortures. Ten years of a life unsullied and honorable so far as the world was concerned lay between him and the distant secret guilt which nobody knew; but he had not escaped his punishment. Wherever he went, he carried with him that burden, which promised to last for his life.

CHAPTER LII.

ABOUT a year after Gertrude's marriage, the last infant of her family came to Amy. This poor little woman had lived a life of most pathetic cheerfulness and activity, since that reproach which her husband had addressed to her just before his father's death: she had been the cause of the delicacy and death of her children. From that moment a new motive, a new incitement, came into the limited maternal horizon of this feeble woman. Even in the heavy mourning which she wore for her father-in-law, Amy went about her house with a quickened step, and forced herself back into old habits and occupations which had long been sufficiently uncongenial to have dropped entirely out of her life. She went back to her old school-girl exercises in music, for example, conquered with hard labor some simple dance measures and childish songs, and as soon as she found she was able to amuse her children with them, found a little real pleasure in the labor. She was no longer content to subside into the dull and stagnant quietness of her lonely life, at least she struggled against her constitutional preference for this quiescent state, and kept herself at first in a perpetual, eager commotion of compulsory liveliness.

Poor wistful soul! the Willesham ladies supposed that the death of the old gentleman must surely have made a considerable difference to the Crawfords, there was so great a change in *her* since that event, and privately were of opinion that Amy did not show a proper degree of decorum in this respect. Poor Amy, however, entirely innocent of any such idea, sincerely sorry for her husband's father, who had always been kind to her, and totally beyond the reach of any worldly elation about increase of fortune (which, besides, was an entirely mistaken supposition), kept her eye on the one motive which alone had power to rouse her, and was pathetically gay in the midst of her weaknesses and pains of maternity, and exerted herself to be pleased and to find pleasure where she

had never before looked for it. She had four boys now living and likely to live, and last of all came to her bosom one last tender gift of Heaven, a little girl, the only girl save Aprile, a representative strangely and sadly dear to her of the deserted child, and born, like her, in the early, hopeful spring.

This event had a great effect upon Amy. Mr. Fordham himself could not penetrate into the cause of the tears of mingled anguish and gladness shed over this child. The good man watched and humphed and muttered to himself his favorite theory about delusion and hallucination, but he could not find those powerful proofs in his favor which he had been able to draw from Amy's former periods of weakness: she was not afraid that anybody in the world could take this baby from her; she was not even deeply and tremulously timid about its health as she had been about the others. She brooded over it with a tender, unexplainable, melancholy delight which was all mystery and darkness to the old doctor; and Mr. Fordham fell back upon the caprices of women and the impossibility of ever comprehending them, as was natural in the circumstances. Not so, however, with nurse Sarah, who found no difficulty in the matter, and professed to know all about it. *She*, in her womanish insight and superior penetration, had, of course, divined it at once.

"Ah, doctor! the first loss ain't like nothing as comes after," said this good woman. "*My* lady hasn't had nothing but boys, as you know, sir, sin' that blessed babby as was took so strange away."

"Took so strange away? what do you mean, you foolish woman?" cried Mr. Fordham.

"I may be a foolish woman—I may; I never was a scholar, nor made no pretence," said nurse Sarah, "but what I say is your own words, if they was to be the death of me. For what was the talk about, and the words you had with *my* lady's good gentleman, doctor, but because the first child was took strange away?"

"There's the mischief of talking to ignorant people," cried the troubled doctor. "You very silly woman, don't you understand that what I objected to was hurrying the poor young lady? I've no doubt they did as well as they could

for the infant. Bless my soul! who in the world ever supposed that any harm had been done to the *child*?"

"It ain't for me to say," said Mrs. Patmore, "nor I don't put mysel' forard, nor never did, as all Willeham knows; but to see that poor lady a-nursing of her little girl, and a-croodling over it, it's enough to go to any one's heart, as has got a heart. She never was just so afore, as far as ever I see; but there's some folks as have been mothers themselves, doctor, though you don't think much on 'em; and it's my belief, she as good as thinks she's got back the first babby, the one as was lost——"

"Eh? do you mean to say the poor creature believes in the transmigration of souls?" cried the doctor. "She isn't a Swedenborgian or a—a mystic, or a what-you-may-call-it, eh; —nonsense! but to be sure, you don't know what I mean. You are a very good nurse, Sarah, my excellent woman, but you should never talk of things you don't understand."

"You might say that, doctor, to a many more nor me," said Sarah, triumphantly, and with a little chuckle of insinuation, as she followed him into the room where Amy sat with her child.

The baby was a lovely little model of infancy, lying in baby state and solemnity on the lap of the delicate mother. While the infant slept on her knee, Amy was working at some pretty article of decoration for it, and had in her face such a tender wistful happiness—happiness inspired with a very soul of sorrow—as nobody had ever seen before. The doctor was impressed by it, he could not well explain why. He had seen her in many such quiet hours before; he had known her sorrows and her sufferings in detail, as medical men come to know the griefs of families; but somehow all his real acquaintance with his poor patient's sorrows had never moved him so deeply as the profound suggestion of past calamity, which breathed out of the happiness in her face.

Nor was there anything to be gleaned from her, in respect to his favorite theory of hallucination, though Mr. Fordham, as usual, was not over-delicate in his questions. With "due regard to delicacy," names, and individual details, and everything which could, as he supposed, betray the subject of his

little memoir, the good doctor had made at least one paper in the *Lancet* out of Amy, under the title of "curious and interesting case;" and this new change, or rather the change dating back for a couple of years from Mr. Crawford's death, which had resulted in this, puzzled him mightily. He did not like to have his curious case slip through his fingers. It was the very reverse of gratifying to the doctor's *amour-propre* and professional pride.

"Come, this is satisfactory," said Mr. Fordham, rubbing his hands; "this is something like recovery. Strangely enough I had just been thinking of the first time I saw you. Circumstances now are most happily different. Ah, my dear Mrs. Crawford, you were a great sufferer at that time; I had fears both for your reason and your life."

Amy could not have that period recalled to her thoughts, even now, without agitation. An uneasy movement, a painful rising color, betrayed her. Her work dropped on her baby's dress, and to compose herself she bent over the child.

"I was very young," she said, with a tremulous self-apology; then, after a pause, "I had never known any trouble," she continued, with a touching humility; but this defence and this argument was wholly addressed to herself.

"And you had been very injudiciously treated, I always said so," repeated the sturdy doctor. "I never heard what that poor little baby of yours died of. I never liked to ask, indeed, as long as you were in trouble; but now, when everything goes well with us—was it constitutional feebleness, or was it disease?"

Amy's hands trembled so much that she had scarcely strength to lift the infant, which was by this time awake, from her knees; her very lips quivered as she spoke.

"Oh, doctor, let us not disturb the past," said the poor mother, with a little gasp and sob; "God has given her back again to me, who deserves nothing—to me who—oh! doctor, let me be thankful! It is strange to feel happy after all; but He would not have sent this joy, if He had not meant it. Do not ask me those terrible questions that break my heart. God has given me back my child!"

As she said this with her infant pressed close to her bosom,

and her cheek touching its little head as though to gain strength from the contact, and all her heart in her face, her husband entered the room. Crawford, too, had noticed the joy more pathetic than tears in Amy's face. He surprised her now in excessive and apparently uncalled for emotion; his whole suspicious nature was roused. He was jealous alike of her happiness and her affliction, jealous of the doctor for whom he had never had any friendly sentiment, and even jealous and embittered against the innocent unconscious infant, who, more than any of her other children, had moved poor Amy's troubled heart.

"I seem to have interrupted an interesting scene. What has been the occasion of such a sentimental *pose*, if, indeed, I may be permitted to ask?" said Crawford, turning with a sneer from his wife to the doctor. "Mrs. Crawford has had an attack of the nerves, I presume."

"Mrs. Crawford rarely has attacks of nerves, so far as I am aware," said the doctor, taking up his hat; "she is only thankful, as a Christian ought to be, after her losses, for a healthy child—good morning, my dear lady; don't move—and glad to have a little girl, they tell me, in the place of the little girl she lost. I understand from the woman," said the doctor, steadily, as Crawford accompanied him to the door, "that a mother never really gets over the loss of her first child!"

To this speech, though it was made very slowly and not without a little defiance, Crawford made no reply, but saw the doctor downstairs with the most perfect gravity and ceremoniousness, an attention which made Mr. Fordham wild.

"By George! I believe that fellow *has* done some harm to the baby, after all, and expects to be hanged for it some day!" cried the doctor, by way of relieving himself when he was out of the house. Then, as he cooled down and forgot his offence, Mr. Fordham returned to his original subject. "That poor little soul!" he muttered to himself, shaking his head with a "chick-chick" of compassion over Amy, as he went his way across the village green; "she doesn't know a thing about it, of course; but as sure as I live, she believes in a transmigration of souls!"

Meanwhile, Crawford rushed upstairs again, taking three

steps at a time, and found an opportunity to send the nurse away and remain alone with his wife; when, as Amy had already foreseen, the coming storm broke upon her.

"What the devil do you mean, perpetually directing everybody's attention to *that* child?" he cried with bitter passion. "If you're happy, can't you be content?—if you are miserable, who can help it? What on earth does all this folly mean? If you want to make another feminine doll of that peevish brat of a baby, who interferes with you? If your other children are to count for nothing before this treasure of a little girl, who cares or who forbids? By Jove! if men only knew the truth of the matter when they make all their fine talk about women and mothers! Mothers! creatures that love their children by way of worrying a man to death! but, for Heaven's sake, can't you be content with your own way and the freedom I leave you, without making theatrical scenes and drawing everybody's attention to that one unfortunate child?"

Amy was not now exactly as she used to be towards her husband. The recent exertion she had made had roused all her faculties a little. She felt now sometimes, when she was unjustly accused, something of that natural stir and glow of indignation which relieves the pressure of wounded feeling; and had learned a little, though only a very little, assertion of her own judgment.

"I do not remember what happened when we came first to Willesham," she said, with a voice which faltered slightly, yet had something of dignity in it, "nor how my illness was explained; but Mr. Fordham does: he asks questions which no one else has ever asked me; but not because I encouraged him to do anything which gives me so much pain. Charles," she said, after a little pause, "as this subject is introduced, I want to ask your sanction to a desire of mine. I wish to—to call this child *Aprile*," she cried, hastily lifting up the infant in her arms as she spoke, and turning its sweet little unconscious face towards its father, with an unconscious pathos of appeal. Her voice sank into a low suppressed murmur of hardly restrained sobs as she uttered the words. She could not have articulated another syllable after that name.

"Good heavens, why?" cried Crawford, who, notwithstand-

ing, was himself somewhat stunned and startled by the name of the deserted child. "Why, in the name of everything devilish? to hold up a perpetual reproach and threat against me as long as I live? to make me detest the imp? is that what you mean?"

"Oh, Charles, it is years long since I have blamed you even in thought. God help me; it was my fault, mine alone! you would have yielded, had not I been such a coward and a fool!" cried poor Amy, with tears.

He turned his eyes upon her very strangely. While she made her womanish confession, he involuntarily, like the man of the world he was, despising both confession and speaker, turned round in his own mind upon the world. What would the world say? who would be blamed by that tribunal,—the girl of nineteen who pleaded for her baby, and was repulsed, and sank into a craze and fever, for lack of strength to resist the will which was stronger than her own; or the mature man who crushed her pleadings down, and dragged her away? Was it necessary, even in his own heart, to ask himself such a question? Did he not know? and was not this very confession and submission of the wife an aggravation of the husband's blame? *He* had not spared to cast the guilt upon her, and drive her to that point of self-accusation; but even this galled him at the moment; for with an involuntary self-torture, it suddenly occurred to him what would be the verdict of the world.

He might have replied angrily or contemptuously, as was most likely, but for something overwhelming which came in that pause of his, at the gallop of an express to the cottage, and with anxious haste to the door of the dressing-room, in which he talked with his wife—Mr. Crawford's own man from town, with a telegraphic message which had suddenly arrived for him at his chambers. Such arrivals are somewhat agitating to common men; but as it might be only political information, or public news, Crawford received it with perfect composure. When he had opened the paper, however, a great change came over him. He cried aloud, "My God!" with an extraordinary sharp cry, and stood in the middle of the room, with the air of a man who has suddenly become

too giddy and faint to move, turning his eyes instinctively towards his wife, with an appeal to her sympathy in his wild stare of horror, amazement, and sudden overpowering blind anxiety, such as he had never made before in his life. She rose unconsciously to meet that look, and came forward to him with her child in her arm. With a strange mixture of need for her and contempt of her, he grasped her outstretched hand, threw it from him, and drew towards him the nearest chair.

"Amy, my uncle Molyneux is dead!" he said, with a startling breathless abruptness. "I am either a ruined man, or I am free."

"Dead! uncle Molyneux *dead!* Oh, Charles, so strong a man, and so bold! is it true?" cried the bewildered Amy, to whom the news brought little anxiety, but only the melancholy surprise of an unexpected death.

Her husband did not answer, perhaps did not even hear her. He sat still for a few moments, recovering himself, taking breath, and endeavoring to take courage, smitten with a dead sickness of desperation and anxiety; his face blanched, his lips dry, a sudden fiery haste consuming him, a sudden helplessness holding him back. Then he rose suddenly, called the man who had brought this message, and gave him clear and rapid orders to return instantly to town, pack what things would be necessary for a week's absence, and proceed to Molyneux Hall by the next train; in the meantime to order his own horse to the door instantly. In this last order, he wavered for a moment: might he not carry Edward with him? but his second thought was wiser; the house of death was not a place for a child, and his boy must not go to Molyneux Hall while *he* remained in this miserable uncertainty, but only as its certain and acknowledged heir.

Few people who had witnessed the scene of the last half-hour, and heard the words of bitter reproach to his blameless wife, which were scarcely off Crawford's lips, could have believed with what a pang this man denied himself the society of his boy, the sole solace of his dry existence. But so it was; he went away, filled with an anxiety that tortured his soul, and made him sick and blind with the agony of its peradven-

ture, yet through all that bitter distress carrying the sole golden thread of his life, that mingled sentiment of great love, which made him yearn for Edward's presence in case of calamity, and yet deny himself that comfort, rather than expose to fatigue, or fright, or mortification, his darling boy; one noblest sentiment of humanity, mingled with all the cruelty and pettiness and personal regard of a selfish nature. So he went away, silent and stern, to know his fate.

While the blinds were all decorously drawn down in the Willesham cottage—while the children were kept at play in the garden, and debarred from their usual walks—while the servants discovered and told each other that master's rich uncle was suddenly dead, and with gleams of new ambition discussed and wondered what consequent changes might be here—then when the night came—when his boys lay sound in childish sleep, and even Amy, with her baby in her bosom, mused only with silent tears over the sweet name by which she already called the child in her heart, and with momentary thoughts of awe recurred to the strong man dead—Crawford pursued his way to Molyneux Hall, dashing onward silent, saying not a word, consumed by his thoughts, his fears, his pursuing spectre of secret guilt, pressing on like a man in a dream to know his fate.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE first information upon the engrossing subject of his thoughts, which Crawford was able to obtain, was from the station-master, at the little country railway station, created to serve the necessities of Molyneux Hall. This man, who beheld in the traveller a new director of "the line," with all sorts of promotions and patronages in his power, was up—a singular exhibition of his intended allegiance to the new sovereign—in time for the arrival of the night train, by which, according to his own private calculations—for he had been a

party in the concoction of the telegraphic message and knew all about it—the new proprietor of Molyneux Hall was likely to arrive. It was his familiar face accordingly which appeared to the traveller as he roused himself with a shiver in the chill of the spring morning from the first moment's sleep which had visited his eyes during the whole night; and when the train had again darted off, leaving Crawford alone upon the little platform with this man and a half-awakened porter, it was to the humble functionary that he addressed himself for news.

"You have heard what has happened, of course. How did he die?—when? I know nothing but the fact," said Crawford, with his blanched face—a face which, in its gray anguish of anxiety and fatigue, looked almost ghastly in this early light.

"Oh, yes, I've heard, sir; it's over the whole country, sir—such a man! universally respected, and all that. Yes, sir," cried the station-master, nervously recovering himself as he perceived the impatience of his auditor; "it was awfully sudden—it was a stroke."

"A stroke?"

"Apoplexy, sir. He was a man of a very full habit of body, was poor Mr. Molyneux—and a short neck, sir, as you might have noticed; he was just the man to go that way, by what the doctors say. The strongest on us have our dangers as well as the weakest, to be sure; and they tell me he never had a day's illness, hadn't the poor gentleman, all his life."

"That will do," cried Crawford, hurriedly. "Are you aware if there is any one at the Hall?"

"Not a soul, sir, nobody but the poor servants. Mr. Molyneux's own man came to me about the telegraph, and told me as his master was all alone, poor gentleman, taking his glass of wine, sir, at his luncheon, when it happened; and was found with the newspaper in his very hand, and not a Christian to see the end of him; for all the servants, ay, and all the friends he had. There's nobody there, sir," continued the station-master, who was unable to speak on such a fertile subject without diverging into moralities, and whom Crawford's frequent gesture of impatience again and again brought

abruptly in the midst of his address, in mortal terror of having offended so important a new proprietor and influence on "the line,"—"there's nobody there but the poor servants, sir, as don't know no more than children what to do."

"Do you know if they have sent a trap, anything to carry me over? or can I get such a thing here?" said Crawford, who had lingered there, after all his haste, with a strange reluctance for the last part of the journey; but who now went forward resolutely through the little office, somewhat strengthened to know that at least no stranger had been present at his uncle's death.

"There's the carriage, sir; they've had it here, sir, off and on, since an hour or so after they sent the message. Poor Mrs. Aspinall, sir, she's as fidgety as can be, and don't know what to do—women always is in a 'mergency," said the station-master. "I suppose they all thought you might maybe travel, sir, by the telegraft," he added, with a humble attempt at a joke."

Crawford thrust past him without taking any notice of that melancholy pleasantry. The new heir did not at all come up in any respect to the railway official's idea of a man who had just come into fifteen thousand a year.

"Besides cash in the funds and shares on the line!" ejaculated the station-master to himself, as Crawford hastened past him at a pace which he could not equal, roused the sleepy coachman on the box of the brougham, which stood a little way down the road, let himself in, and was driven rapidly away;—"and with neither smile nor sigh, as I can see. To be sure, he looks miserable enough; men like that *will* look miserable in a morning afore they've shaved."

Saying which, he rubbed his own rough chin complacently, and went back to cast an eye upon his flower-beds, where already the dew began to glisten in the early sun. He was something of a florist, and a new pansy showed a beautiful bloom that morning;—perhaps he was happier than the man who had just come into fifteen thousand a year.

The morning light gleamed sweet and fresh upon all the dewy shrubberies and cool green slopes of lawn, when Crawford came in sight of the Hall. Never at any other time of

the year were these low thickets so gay. Pink sprays of almond blossom, rich clumps of early hawthorn, the first bright tassels of the laburnum, and even some splendid clusters of rhododendron, brightened the masses of verdure, which made a close rich fringe round the rising ground of the lawn. But on the summit stood the house, with its blank front to the sunshine, and its heavy lines of closed windows, not staring abroad as usual in its arrogant wealth, but shut up and frowning in a dismal show of mourning which was not sorrow.

He whom everybody regarded as the new lord of the house, collected his faculties with an effort, as the little carriage entered at the gates, and stopping it there, got out and walked up to the door. It was opened for him by an eager servant already on the watch, animated partly by anxiety to be first to greet the new master, and partly by the uneasy pressure of responsibility which the whole household felt upon its shoulders till his arrival. Within, the butler and Mr. Molyneux's own man waited the appearance of their new lord. The unhesitating homage of the reception they gave him, had a slightly encouraging effect upon the mind of the anxious heir; but there was something in the aspect of the closed-up house, the mysterious subdued light, the silence, the constrained voices and muffled steps, which soon stifled the one throb of exultation breaking through his gloom as for the first moment he permitted himself to believe that all was safe.

The same story which he had already heard was now repeated to him, somewhat more in detail. They could only tell him in return to his anxious questions, that there was no apparent cause for the sudden seizure, no stranger had come to the hall with a private tale for Mr. Molyneux's own ear, no letter had arrived, no unusual agitation been visible. They brought him the paper which had been taken out of the dead man's hand; they showed him the room, still undisturbed, in which he had been found, with his biscuit half eaten, and his glass of sherry spilled upon the cloth,—everything left so that he might see it and that it might be visible at the "inquest," a word which the retainers of the great house pronounced with some indignation, and from which Crawford

involuntarily shrank. Mr. Molyneux, it appeared, had been left undisturbed for nearly two hours at that fatal table before the surprised servants ventured to investigate the cause of his unusual quietness. There he was found lying on the floor between his chair and the fireplace, with his arm stretched out as if towards the bell, and the newspaper in his other hand. He had taken his luncheon that day, as it happened, in a little morning room at the end of a long gallery, from which he could see his favorite shrubs in blossom, and his fall had not been heard in the great active house. The surgeon whom the terrified servants sent for instantly, had pronounced him to have been dead for some hours, and to have died instantaneously; that was all. Then the butler whispered lower still the first necessary arrangements which they had "taken the liberty" to make; and would Mr. Charles view the body?

"It was very calm, sir, very calm; noways distorted, nor—nor dreadful; for master, sir, was a good man at bottom, though hasty," said the old servant; "and you would think had gone off peaceful like a lamb in his bed."

But Crawford was not prepared yet for *that* sight. He preferred going to his own usual apartment to take an hour or two's rest after his journey, leaving directions that his man should come to him as soon as he arrived, and approving of what the others had done. With a sigh of relief he closed his door and threw himself into a chair when he was alone, not to rest, but to examine with anxious and breathless attention that newspaper, crumpled by the grasp of the dead fingers: was there anything in that to account for this sudden frightful event? was there anything there throwing light upon his own secret—betraying *himself*?

But the paper was only the *Times* of the previous day, as he had himself read it a few hours before uncle Molyneux sat down with the news to his luncheon. He went over it till his head ached, reading paragraph after paragraph, of which the mere words, and not the sense, struck his excited mind. But there was nothing there. His own name did not occur in the entire paper, save in the harmless list of a parliamentary division. He could find no trace of any agitation connected

with himself, any discovery or new revelation of his own story, in the whole brief tragical tale. Uncle Molyneux was dead, had died suddenly at his own table, of apoplexy, as was not extraordinary considering his development of body and manner of life—and that was all; the immediate cause, if there were one, was lost in the silence of death, which would never be broken. Whatever secrets that deadly moment held were hidden and sealed up for ever.

A momentary sense of comfort and relief came over Crawford's mind as he laid down the paper, for he had not been able to divest himself of the idea that some sudden light thrown upon his own affairs had excited his relative to sudden passion, and been the cause of his death, besides possibly producing results upon his will as lamentable. He threw himself now upon his bed with the intention of resting; but his relief was of very short duration, for he had scarcely laid his head upon the pillow when a new course of self-torture began. He could not sleep, he could only think the more in the quietness, and, in spite of all the efforts of self-control possible to him, could not keep down the buzz of painful recollections, frightfully minute and particular, which brought before him every incident of his last interview with uncle Molyneux—every word, and every tone. He was obliged to get up in desperation, after half an hour's strenuous but vain attempts to subdue himself. His restlessness, his miserable uncertainty, grew to a height of fever; it seemed almost impossible to him to endure the two hours of this quiet early morning which must intervene before the arrival of his servant; and how *should* he bear the three or four days which must pass before the pompous funeral was over, and it should be possible to ascertain the contents of the will?

These days were dreadful days, days of torture unmitigated, in which his alternations of hope and fear were almost beyond endurance. He conducted all the arrangements, however, with a stern decorum, which, though it was only the result of his own weakness—of the anxiety which was sick at his heart, which took the light from his eye and the moisture from his lip—gained him nevertheless an increased respect from all the people around him, and filled

the neighborhood with admiring comments on the "perfect propriety" of the new heir's conduct.

"Deeply attached to the old gentleman he can't have been; he has the good sense not to pretend it," said the gossip of the locality; "but so totally removed from any vulgar exultation at coming into so fine a fortune: ah! depend upon it, after all, there's a great deal in blood!" and humbler voices echoed this tribute. Even Mrs. Aspinall was proud of her new master, and began to change her mind about retiring from her situation. However, "Mr. Charles" would have nothing said yet about future arrangements—would not say what he would do, nor be told of anybody else's intention.

"At present," he had said, "I am only one of my late excellent uncle's nearest relatives, acting as his representative until his will is known. I have no warrant to consider myself master of the house; let everything be postponed till after the reading of the will."

And with these words on his lips Crawford had turned away with an austere reserve and apparent indifference to the brilliant future in which everybody but himself seemed to believe, that his character rose to an inconceivable pitch of perfection in the opinion of the household and the neighborhood; for nobody knew the desperate tension of that self-tormenting soul—nobody could imagine the spectre of guilt which stood between him and those fair possessions, and thrust him back whenever he began to hope. Uncle Molyneux lay silent, holding solemn state for the first time, and disclosing nothing of the intentions which now were unchangeable; and his heir waited, through all those dismal preparations, in that shut-up house as a man waits for a sentence of death.

CHAPTER LIV.

WITH a mingled sensation of relief, and extreme unendurable excitement, Crawford found himself in the dining-room of Molyneux Hall five days after his arrival there, after all the pomp and solemn parade of a great funeral, waiting to hear the will. Only a very few of the funeral train remained: the doctor, who had *not* attended Mr. Molyneux, and whose hopes of a legacy were of the very faintest description; the rector, who was stimulated by still smaller expectations; the noble neighbor who waited only from "respect," and that he might congratulate the new proprietor, "for, of course, we all know how the bulk of the property is to go," my lord observed, "and there is none of that melancholy excitement of rival expectations which one so often sees at the reading of a will, to make *this* painful. A few thousand pounds in legacies, of course, and gifts to servants. Ah, poor Molyneux! we'll miss you at Bolton Abbey; he was an excellent neighbor, poor fellow; though I trust in that respect," said his lordship, with a little bow to Crawford, "we shall lose less than we shall gain."

But the noble earl had a large family, and his own ado in pecuniary matters; he would not have objected if the few thousand pounds to be distributed in legacies included his own right honorable name. The other persons present were Mr. Crawford of Rookley, and the lawyer who held the important document. There were no rival expectations, no pale antagonist faces, the one set in deadly courtesy against the other—nothing to make this scene remarkable. The very lawyer was leisurely and indifferent, and nobody in the room had the slightest doubt as to the contents of that mysterious paper, save the one whom everybody recognized without hesitation as the undoubted heir. *He* sat at the table, his blanched face showing white in contrast with his mourning dress, his lips parched and trembling, his very articulation painful—longing, yearning, at the bottom of his hard, worldly heart,

for the touch of that child's hand stealing into his, which could best have supported him through this hour. Yet how could he wish for Edward here? If Edward ever heard such words as those which rang in an imaginary chorus through his father's brain, setting forth, in hard legal phraseology, how and why the destination of the Molyneux estates had been altered, and Charles Crawford, in consequence of discoveries made which affected his honor, set aside from being heir—it seemed to Crawford that he must share his uncle's fate and die in the moment—such anguish was more than he could have borne.

Yet it was the apprehension of this which haunted him as he sat at that table, looking round upon those unsuspecting faces, all ready to do him honor, glancing unawares at the sumptuous apartment, which, if graver than the rest of the house, still showed Uncle Molyneux's taste for the magnificent; taking in the whole scene, even to the fine pictures on the walls, the splendid size of the room, the courteous, friendly interest of the spectators—everything so profoundly unlike what everything would be half an hour hence, if his morbid fear was realized, and to the little Willesham cottage, in which he must hide his dishonored head. He sat supporting his head in his hands, going over in imagination those cruel visionary words which should disinherit him. He felt as if he were already familiar with their very form and tenor—"in consequence of discoveries made which deeply affected his honor, and made him, in the testator's opinion, a person entirely unfit to represent an honorable family and bear the responsibilities of a landed proprietor." If these words did not exist, what devilish imp could have invented them? Surely there did not exist, even in Satanic contrivance, a will so cruel. No! it was a frightful foresight, a prophetic intuition. He sat, drawn closely up, like a man who sets himself to bear some desperate operation—knee pressed against knee, and his head set almost painfully into the supporting socket of his palms, waiting to hear, amid his friends and neighbors, in the room where they all expected to be entertained by him, and of which already he was master, those words which should send him down—down from his fictitious elevation, a

baffled adventurer, the object only of their compassion or contempt.

In the singular reality of this apprehension he scarcely heard the preamble of the will—scarcely noted, though he heard, the list of legacies, and buried his face in his hands when the reader made a loud preliminary “hem,” and began, with the importance it deserved, the principal paragraph in the brief, but momentous document. Everybody else sat calmly listening—it was only what everybody knew and expected. He raised himself bolt upright in his chair, with his dry lips falling apart, and his heart beating as though it would choke him. There was nothing there about discoveries made, or unworthiness found out—there was not an inference of doubt or hesitation. Nothing but a slow and gradual repetition of all the substantial and varied riches which accompanied Molyneux Hall, the Lancashire estates, the great brewery, the shares in various railroads, the money invested here and there at mortgage, the wealthy increasing suburb of the great neighboring town—all bequeathed by the testator to his beloved young relative Charles Crawford, second son of Reginald Crawford, of Rookley, in Surrey, on condition—Here the reader made a little pause, once more cleared his throat, and looked round with a half-grave, half-smiling shake of his head, as a living man comments on the crotchet of a dead one. “On condition——”

Moved altogether beyond his own power of control, Crawford stood up, unconsciously clenching his hand hard upon the table. He had borne his own imaginations till he could bear them no longer; he had begun to yield to the blessed relief of finding them chimeras, and was the blow coming now?

“On condition,” continued the reader, with that grave half-smile, “that his eldest son Edward, or, in case of his death without issue, the eldest survivor amongst the sons of the said Charles Crawford, be his heir and successor, bearing the name and arms of Molyneux, and that the estate and possessions above enumerated shall under no circumstances be transferred to the younger branch of his descendants, but remain in the elder line, the heir always taking with the estates the sole surname of Molyneux.”

"Charley, my dear fellow, sit down; what's the matter with you? You're not a man to get nervous, especially when you've come into your fortune," said Joe, rousing his brother with a hearty grasp of his hand. "Wish you joy and great luck in your new circumstances, old boy. Have a glass of wine, Charley; you've been overdoing yourself, and, poor old fellow! after all, though a man has little time for mourning in this busy world, and I ought to be ashamed of myself for taking it so lightly, he was a very good friend to *you*."

This speech, and the glass of Madeira which accompanied it, roused Crawford at once from his stupor of overwrought excitement. He felt his frame tingle all over with the terrible probation through which he had passed, and he still could hardly realize the inconceivable relief; but he was himself again in an instant, ready to receive and respond to the congratulations offered to him, and to glide at once into the position so often assigned to him already, of master of the house. He knew what he was doing, and did and said what was necessary like a man of the world; but at the same time felt nothing save an unspeakable ease, which he was half afraid of, and still moved about like a man in a dream. Fortunately, no one stayed long; there was a little discussion over the "condition" of the inheritance, and grave smiles at the whimsical covetousness of the dead man, who thus took pains to secure for his own possessions the young presumptive heir of Rookley, the eldest offshoot of the Crawford tree.

"That last stroke of his is into me, poor old boy. I don't grudge him his triumph; but my father would have grumbled," said the good-humored Joe; "you must make over little Charley to me; but you'll always be richer people at Molyneux Hall. Come along, old fellow; throw yourself on a sofa and rest; you will never be fit to go into town to-night. Come along; you have fagged yourself out."

On this hint the last lingerer of the company departed, save the lawyer, who had various directions to ask from the new proprietor; and Crawford at last found himself alone. Was it over? was it true? was the last man who could harm him safely dead and buried, and his secret harmless for ever? Was the goal of his hopes reached at last, his position

secured, his punishment, so far as the world was concerned, impossible? But his strained mind had no room for exultation or triumph: he felt only the relief, the ease, the deliverance; and throwing himself upon his bed, with the first impulse of nature, slept, for the first time since his arrival at Molyneux Hall, the profound and dreamless sleep of a fatigued child.

CHAPTER LV.

So great had been the fatigue and exhaustion of the new master of Molyneux, that he did not awake throughout the whole evening, nor till dawn of the next day, and his brother Joe, who was neither fatigued nor excited, but only sorry with an honest but moderate grief for uncle Molyneux, found the evening rather a tedious one, in spite of a good dinner and the professional civilities of the lawyer. Decorum and Mrs. Aspinall had forbidden the sudden opening of the house on the day of the funeral, and drawn blinds and closed shutters are not only melancholy things in themselves, but suggest so strongly former times distinguished by the same sad ceremonial, when perhaps the affliction was more poignant, that it is hard to avoid their depressing influence.

Mr. Molyneux had left little real sorrow, little love, behind him; he had been kind, but only as selfish men are kind, with a capricious and arrogant beneficence; and he had no long illness, no softened decline, to mellow his memory to the members of the household. The imperious master had died in a moment, with no interval of anxiety or care to endear him to any one, and it was decorum which reigned in the silence of the great house, and put on new mourning for the dead master, and put up its handkerchief to tearless eyes. He was decently regretted, but he was not mourned. This, however, of course, only aggravated all the proprieties of the occasion, and the servants stole about their occupations, and the dinner was placed upon the table, with a lugubrious solemnity which

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affected Joe considerably. The kind-hearted fellow would not permit his brother to be roused, and had scarcely sufficient spirits to keep up a conversation with his only companion, the lawyer, who at last fell into silence too.

Those vast, gleaming, magnificent rooms, hung with the pictures of which uncle Molyneux had used to have so many tales to tell—where he got that “gem;” how he smuggled another out of the country, which, had the transaction been known, it would never have been permitted to quit; which among the modern examples had been painted expressly for him; and which he had picked up in a neglected corner of an exhibition, thereby laying the foundations of somebody’s fame. His person and presence pervaded the whole house with an extraordinary identity, and Joe Crawford sighed a “Poor old boy! I wonder what he’s got now to make up for it;” a genuine if unsentimental expression of grief, before he yawned himself to sleep after dinner in his easy-chair. No sincerer lamentation had been made for uncle Molyneux; as for his heir, in his own pressing anxieties and apprehensions, he had scarcely thought of his relative and benefactor at all; certainly never as men think of a dead man, only as a living energetic intelligence able to overwhelm and ruin him still.

When Crawford woke in the morning, the sun was shining into his room, the birds were singing, a sweet rustle of leaves and scent of blossoms was in the air. It was some moments before he came to himself and could comprehend where he was, and why he lay there, fully dressed, upon his bed, where careful hands had covered without disturbing him. When at last he remembered everything, the first sensation was exquisite and overpowering beyond expression. He was free; nothing could now either ruin or disgrace him; his own future, and that of his boy, was secure, his family provided for; and not only provided for, raised to a point of wealth and importance which he had never fully permitted himself to realize.

This first delicious moment of his waking, when his certain position, the end of his long and harassing anxieties, and the great accession of consequence and power which he had gained, became for the first time fairly visible to Crawford in

their daylight security, was almost worth the years of care, the days of agony, which had preceded it. It seemed to him for the moment, that all his troubles were buried in that grave over which he shed no tear ; and after so long an apprenticeship emancipation was sweet. Now neither discovery nor caprice could mar his fortune ; some darkling mole of society, working underground, might possibly root out his secret still, but nobody could interfere with the settled and established place which he now held, and few could have credit enough to shake the established position of years, backed by all the wealth and independence of Molyneux Hall. He was safe, and his fears were over, and Edward was now the eldest son and heir of a rich man. Edward ! why had he not brought the boy ? why had he deprived himself of that one solace of his life, for the sake of some morbid ridiculous fears which had vanished like the mist ? He could scarcely believe, looking back upon yesterday, how entirely he had been under the dominion of apprehensions so insane and extraordinary. He looked back upon those hours before the reading of the will, those days which had passed since he came to Molyneux, and could not comprehend them. What was he afraid of ?—spectres, shadows of his own imaginations, idle specks in the air.

When he had refreshed himself and changed his dress, he went downstairs. It was still very early, but already all the windows were opened, the shutters put back, the curtains drawn, and the light and the day triumphed with all the sweet revulsion of nature over the compulsory funereal gloom. Crawford wandered through the rooms, giving way to an involuntary elation, which, perhaps, he would have scorned in another man ; sheltering himself in the early hour and moment of solitude, and assuring his possession by that survey of conscious ownership. He looked at the fine pictures on the walls, but not with Joe's recollection of their late possessor, nor with that feeling of uncle Molyneux's personal pervading presence among the beautiful things he had loved, which only last night struck so strongly the thoughts of his good-hearted brother. A different feeling possessed the new master of this splendid house : they belonged to uncle Moly-

neux no longer; they were *his*. Then he looked out upon the gay shrubberies, with their lovely profusion of spring blossom. It was uncle Molyneux who had arranged his grounds after this fashion; it was he, with all his strong animal senses, refined by education, a lover of color and perfume and every exquisite thing in nature, who had chosen to border his bower after a very unusual fashion, with all those low thickets of spring blossoms; the sweetest, gayest, most spontaneous, and abundant of flowers. But though they had this additional melancholy association now, that their late possessor had met his death in solitude for the pleasure of overlooking them; and that, perhaps, but for that last indulgence of his taste, medical aid and human help might still have been in time to save him; Crawford put his head out of the window to breathe their sweetness, with no more thought of uncle Molyneux than if such a person had never existed.

Uncle Molyneux was gone and past, and the place which had known him should know him no more. His heir looked abroad upon the lovely May morning, upon the broad flat landscape with its fields and trees, the distant smoke of labor on the horizon, the tame river already bearing its barges to busy sale and exchange, the slow, early laborers at their rural toil; and, with an expanded breast and gleam of triumph, sought out in that wide prospect what was *his*, and beheld slow labor and quick commerce alike bringing increase to his store. The sweet air breathed over the lawn from the blossomed trees, and Crawford only saw the spring luxury of flower and leaf which belonged to *him*, and imagined his children already at play upon the delicate grass. It was *his* the whole enchanted scene he looked upon. Uncle Molyneux, like his own apprehensions, had vanished like a mist, and was to be thought of no more.

He had but little time, however, to indulge in these thoughts. He had to see the lawyer, to write various letters, and to make preparations for returning to town that day; and, benignant as his present temper was, he made a note to his wife the first work he engaged in on this propitious day. As it was a model of conjugal letter-writing, the epistle may be given entire as Amy received it. It did not wound or dis-

appoint her, luckily; she thought it a very good letter as letters go.

"MY DEAR AMY,

"Mr. Molyneux's will was read yesterday. Of course you are prepared for its contents; he has left me everything, as I have long been aware he would. This, of course, will make a great change in our circumstances and mode of living. 'I shall wish you' to make immediate preparations for coming to Molyneux. In future seasons we can have a house in town; but while you are in mourning and out of society, as must be the case this year, it is unnecessary and would be unseemly. It will be most proper and becoming that the family should be established here as soon as possible, where I can join you when Parliament rises. I do not object to your retaining the house at Willesham, if you wish it. It might be convenient, as being near town; but make all other arrangements without delay—especially a matter which I trust you have already attended to, as respects the proper mourning for *all* the household.

"My brother Joe is with me; everything has gone off very satisfactorily; some alterations will be necessary in the establishment here, but these can be best discussed when you are at Molyneux. I shall be in town to-night, and probably will manage to get to Willesham before dinner to-morrow. My love to Edward and the children.

"Yours ever,

"C. C.

"P.S.—I forget to say that we shall hereafter call ourselves *Molyneux*; it is a provision in the will. I shall order the proper cards for you in town to-morrow. And, by the by, I have no longer any objection to your naming the baby as you please, only let it be done while I am absent. I do not admire your choice of a name."

Having finished this affectionate epistle, Crawford, who began to be very hungry and to remember that he did not dine yesterday, ordered some breakfast, which he eat with

remarkable relish and appetite; showing, in every particular of his thoughts, temper, and appearance, so total a difference from the previous day, that it would have been an easier exercise for the faith of a spiritual observer, had such been present and able to see how the mind worked, to believe that he possessed two different natures, than that this was one and the same unmistakeable man.

CHAPTER LVI.

It was not till next morning, the morning of the day on which he was to be expected home, that Amy received her husband's letter. What concerned her most in it was the gracious permission contained in the postscript. She was to name her baby as she pleased; that idea so much exceeded for the moment, in Amy's estimation, anything which could be derived from Molyneux Hall, that the now established wealth of her family affected her in a very much less degree than it might and perhaps ought to have done. She was, in some respects, in reality an aggravating wife for a man like Crawford; the magnitude of the establishment at Molyneux rather alarmed and overawed than elated her, and Amy felt much more at ease in her present position with the domestic occupations congenial to her, and her womanly economics and government in her own hand, than she supposed she could ever be with the grand housekeeper and embarrassing splendor of her new habitation. However, she said very little about her timidity, as she said little about anything, but took immediate measures to quicken the progress of the village dressmaker, that her maids might appear in due sable before her husband's return, she herself and the children being already provided with the needful mourning which represented so little grief. When she had done that, and gone over in her mind which of her servants should accompany her to the new home, and exerted herself to look over the wardrobe of the children and see all

their half-worn dresses laid out in a heap for the comfort of various poor families at Willesham, Amy had done about as much as she could do towards the settlement of the family concerns here, and the preparations for going away.

Crawford's income, though enough, had been only "limited" in these past years, and still more limited had been Amy's portion of it. This had stimulated the natural housewifely turn of her mind, and there were no stray bills now to look up, or uncertain debts to be settled; time enough on the last day to make the last settlement of her modest domestic expenditure with the Willesham tradespeople, who found her the most exemplary of customers; and, except farewell calls, for which she was not at present strong enough, and actual packing up, there was scarcely anything more to do.

When, however, in the confidence of her own room, Amy confided to nurse Sarah some particulars of the event which had just happened, and the change which approached, that worthy woman was more excited than her "lady." Sarah was growing old by this time, and began to feel the fatigues of her calling rather too much for her; her children were married, and she was solitary in her cottage. Then, ever since her first introduction to the poor young sufferer in her brain-fever, the heart of the motherly, humble old woman had yearned over her melancholy patient. Nobody else had ever listened as meekly to her advices and remonstrances; nobody else had ever fallen upon her tender old bosom in the blind agony of bereavement. It was something more than a comfortable establishment for her old age that Sarah thought of: she could not bear in all sincerity to part with the babies she had nursed and the young mother whom she had tended. For Amy was young still, poor soul, after all her troubles; young enough to enter brilliantly, if it had been in her, to her new career of wealth and consequence; young enough and pretty enough, despite her many children, her cares and fatigues of maternity, to make people forget that she was not clever, and had neither rank nor wit to illustrate her husband's choice. She thought of that, however, as little as a woman could think. What vanity she had now concerned ~~only~~ her babies; and her innate dread of Molyneux Hall and the grand

housekeeper made her all the more easily affected by the sudden tears which nurse Sarah tried to hide.

"I can't a-bear partings," said the old woman. "I'd 'most rather you didn't tell me, ma'am, when you was a-going. I haven't so many friends in the world as I can afford to lose 'em. Maybe you and the children will pay a visit about Willesham now and again for the sake of old times, and I'll make bould to come and see you, for to say good-bye out and out, breaks an old body's heart."

"I shall be just as sorry to part with you, Sarah," said Amy. "What would you say to come to Molyneux with me, and be in the nursery, and take care of us when anybody was poorly? Nobody but you can manage Charley when anything ails him except myself; and I fear I shall have other things to look after. If you would come with us, nurse, it would be a great comfort to me: will you, Sarah?" and Amy laid down her work, and looked with her mild, inquiring smile in the old woman's face.

"Will I? Oh, bless her dear heart, hear how she speaks!" cried poor Sarah. "I'd go with you cheerful, if you was a-going to a cabin across the seas; but I'm an old body, and soon I'll be off my work, and there isn't above a year or a couple of year left in me; and to take such like as me to a grand house where the very servants go like ladies and gentlemen. Bless you for the word, if it ain't like an angel, it's like yourself, that's next best; but oh, ma'am, what would your good gentleman say?"

"You must not call Mr. Crawford my 'good gentleman,' Sarah," said Amy, smiling: "that would not do at Molyneux Hall: but he will say nothing at all, so you may be very easy about that. Only you must think of your own children. Should you not be unhappy about them if you were living so far away?"

"Mary, my youngest, has two of her own now," said Sarah, thoughtfully. "When a woman bears a babe, ma'am, it's a deal more to her than the mother that bore her. It sounds unnat'ral, but it's God appointment. I was the same myself; they're all well to do in their poor ways, thanks to them that's favored their mother: bless you, they'll find no want o' me."

"Then what do you say, Sarah? will you come with me?" said the new lady of Molyneux.

If Amy had asked the maids in the nursery what *they* would say, and especially that imposing head nurse, who, as Mrs. Crawford kept no regular maid of her own, was unquestionably the greatest person in the house, she might have received a very different answer; for, to tell the truth, nurse Patmore was somewhat disposed to interfere with the spoonfuls of magnesia and the gray powders administered by that important personage, and was ready to start up in arms at any moment to deliver Charley or little Reginald from the horrors of a shower-bath. Sarah's own answer, however, was an ecstasy of grateful doubts and delights, which settled the question.

The old woman took the earliest opportunity of hastening down-stairs to inform her confidential friend, the cook, of her extraordinary good fortune—the poor cook, who had heard of Mr. Molyneux's *chef*, and could entertain no such hopes. After that intimation the household was fairly upset and thrown into all the disorganization which precedes a change; the two young nurse-maids were in a flutter of delight at the thought of the great household of which they were about to form a part; the head nurse was solemn, grand, and dissatisfied, feeling nurse Sarah already a thorn in her flesh; the kitchen disconsolate and melancholy, yet not without hopes of "bettering" itself.

On the whole, the news created sufficient commotion to have satisfied anybody. Edward and Charley in full speculation on the subject fairly drove their still weak mother into a headache, though that was not a foible of Amy's, with talk of the fabulous ponies, pigeons, dogs, and rabbits of Molyneux Hall; and even little Reginald hurrah'd shrilly with his three-year-old voice, and the lately deposed baby flourished his rattle, and produced a crow of imitation which almost frightened his startled nurse into hysterics.

Such was the course of affairs at Willesham during this exciting day; only the latest infant, the tender little womanly blossom, the new Aprile, lay placid through all the stir, in her baby state, unmoved by the grandeur of which she too should

have her share; and Amy, released and left to herself, sat brooding over her child, forgetting Molyneux and its wealth in the sad delight of repeating again and again, with tears in her eyes, that sweet, long silent name—Aprile! Was it only a mournful satisfaction of love, remembering the baby lost? was it a wile of motherly yearning that revived the name, a white, unconscious, innocent dove sent out into the world with the mother's forlorn cry of longing after her forsaken child; but Amy never spoke her purpose, nor told what was in her heart, unless it might be in her murmurs of secret caressing over that unconscious child.

Meanwhile Edward stood at the gate in the evening sunshine, discoursing grandly to his brother Charley about Molyneux and its wonders, and looking out for papa. The boy already held his head higher and looked with proud bright eyes along the sunny road. Change and the unknown were enough to flush the childish skies of Edward's young horizon; but the sight of his heir waiting for him at the cottage gate was almost a triumph too much for the arriving father. It added the higher throb of love to Crawford's exultation. Perhaps they had never rested beneath that roof, all of them in a state so near happiness, strangely divided and separate as they were, and drawing their joy from different sources, as that night.

CHAPTER LVII.

WHERE the preparations were so easily accomplished, and nothing but neighborly leave-takings, and Amy's health, still only partially established, remained to delay them, it was not long before the family, now, with some feelings of novelty and uneasiness, bearing the name of Molyneux, set out for their new home. They left the cottage, amid the universal regrets of Willesham, where, however, amid all their lamentations, the gossips found leisure to observe, that even "in her delicate condition, poor lady," her husband did not come to Willesham

for Amy, but was only to meet her at the railway, as became a man whose time was so much occupied, and whose movements were so important. More probably Crawford was afraid—and it would not have been without reason—of the huge female cavalcade which now formed his travelling *impedimenta*.

With two boys still in petticoats, and two nursery-maids in attendance upon them, not to speak of the head nurse, with nurse Sarah, ample and important in her new mourning, carrying the baby, and occupying a seat in the same carriage which conveyed his wife and himself to Molyneux, it was not surprising that the member for Fantwich should shrink from the too responsible task of embarking and disembarking, and conducting through the crowded London streets, that monstrous regiment of women. He did not approve over much, if the truth were told, of Amy's last addition to her household. Perhaps the wife's nurse is not, in ordinary cases, a very general favorite with the husband, and Mrs. Patmore knew more about their past history than the head of the house desired any one at Molyneux Hall to know.

But Crawford, though he was not a very kind husband, was not the kind of man to make petty interferences with his wife's arrangements. Nurse Sarah was entirely too humble a personage to call for any notice from him; and he submitted to her presence with a kind of lofty politeness towards his wife, which sufficed to let Amy know the expediency of keeping her new attendant as much as possible out of her husband's way, a hint which she was sufficiently experienced in his "ways" and manners to take.

As they drew near Molyneux Crawford drew Edward between his knees, that he might show him from the window the first glimpse of his new home. They had comparatively little to do with it, these others. The delicate little mother leaning back in her corner, far more solicitous about "baby" than about the approach to Molyneux, and reluctant to raise herself even so far as to look out, lest she should disturb her fair-haired Charley, who had dropped asleep, rosy and smiling, with his head upon her arm. No, *they* had very little to do with that new inheritance: the baby a mere youngest child, a

girl, born to be married and separated, and belong to somebody else; Charley, who most likely would one day be Crawford of Rookley; and the harmless domestic woman, who was only their mother, and would drop away and die after awhile, leaving scarcely a visible gap in that great house. The true persons concerned were those two at the window, the father and his heir.

As he looked out upon Molyneux, with his head high and his eyes shining in a restrained but unmistakeable glow of exultation and triumph, holding one of Edward's hands in his own, and grasping the boy's arm with the other, to warn him of the first glimpse of his future home, Crawford scarcely remembered the condition of mind in which a few weeks ago he had travelled this same road, where uncle Molyneux still held awful possession of the habitation he had built for himself. If he did remember it in his changed circumstances, this sunny afternoon bore no greater impression of that doubtful dawn of morning than did his mind and sensations. He was not humbled to think of his past errors; he was not grateful to remember that they *were* past, and set at rest for ever; he only scorned them in his arrogant good-fortune; there was no reality in them—morbid mists of imagination, which had vanished like the mists of night.

The shrubberies were already diminished of their sweetness, but were gay with later and less fragrant blossoms; and once more all the gleaming windows of the great house looked out with a lordly stare upon the subject country which lay at its feet. The servants were ranged in the hall, waiting to receive the new family. Mrs. Aspinall, dignified, but condescending, in her rustling black silk and crape, prepared to make a curtesy of protection to her new lady, and to be interested in the children, but entirely of opinion that she herself was an older institution, and of more importance in her home of years, than ever could be the "Mrs. Charles," whom she was very slow to call Mrs. Molyneux.

Such a landing, however, with an anxious mother like Amy, who waited to see all her babies safely delivered out of their conveyances, and herself superintended their progress into the nursery, took the wind out of the housekeeper's sails.

Her new lady was so much more occupied in restraining Charley, and encouraging little Reginald, and sending off in all haste, out of hearing, the *late* baby, Master Joe, who chose to inaugurate the new condition of Molyneux, and prove to demonstration the existence of "a young family," by such an open-mouthed and hearty roar as well-dispositioned babies delight in, that even Mrs. Aspinall's grand curtesy attracted only a very small share of attention, and was acknowledged so briefly, that Amy's pre-occupation took the form of dignity, and overawed the important ruler of the servants' hall.

By and by, the whole momentous business managed to get completed, and quietness was restored—quietness comparative, not such stately quiet as was wont to prevail when master was alone in his sumptuous room, and only the early army of housemaids in the morning, and the bustle of cooking before dinner, disturbed the composure of the house. Now Mrs. Molyneux's new maid rang bells, and issued orders, with all the importance belonging to her office. Now there were endless particulars of refreshment and comfort wanted for the nursery, cups of tea, and plates of sandwiches, and milk enough to have drowned that obstreperous Joe, whose shout was audible now and then as the door was opened. Things were changed, alas! in Molyneux. Now it was a sudden scamper and shouting along a passage, as Reginald, taking his opportunity, and not half reconciled to his new quarters, rushed off on a voyage of discovery to find mamma, and was brought back after a scuffle and scream. Now it was Charley whooping *his* war cry, and making the walls resound with shouts of "Edward! Edward!" the eldest brother being still absent in dignified retirement with papa in the library. Now it was the shrill small pipe of the new Aprile, betraying *her* baby inclinations.

The old servants clustered together, and shook their heads in an indignant protest. This was what Molyneux had come to! this was how "the new family" disturbed the quiet of their old age! The housekeeper had serious thoughts of making a representation on the subject to Mr. Crawford Molyneux, and stating her conviction that it would be quite impossible to "put up" with so many children in the house. Second

thoughts, however, showed the impracticability of this project, and virtuous endurance became the rule of the housekeeper's room and servants' hall.

Next morning Amy took her elder boys over the house to see all its splendors and glories; even Edward being graciously permitted by his father to accompany the party. Regy, still a little frightened, kept fast hold of his mother's hand; Charley made dauntless excursions before, and runs into stray rooms which were not in their regular line of sight-seeing, while Edward marched with gentlemanly decorum, already sensible of his dignity as heir, by his mother's side. The boy had already learned a certain boyish sense of property in all the grandeur he saw, thanks to his father's lessons; and explained to Charley what this thing and the other meant, with a certain condescension. The children looked with awe and admiration upon the pictures, and thought all the gilding gold, and were duly impressed with the magnificent range of rooms, which nothing in Willesham and nothing in Rookley could be compared to. They came at last, in the end of their round, to the morning room in which uncle Molyneux died. The thought somewhat overcame Amy; she sat down with a little awe and faintness, thinking of that solemn moment when the rich man forsook his wealth, and when Molyneux Hall and all its treasures became less than nothing to their proud possessor.

The boys came round in a little crowd to know what ailed her. This was the last room, she told them, in which poor uncle Molyneux had sat before his death. It was here he had eaten his luncheon the very day he died. She did not add that he had died here. The children looked round them with a little sudden gravity and seriousness, but there was nothing awful in the bright little room, with its open windows and cheerful prospect over the shrubbery; on the contrary, it was much more homelike and familiar to them than the large apartments they had just left.

"But, mamma," said Charley, with a sudden thought; "is nobody sorry for uncle Molyneux?"

This was rather a startling inquiry, and puzzled the mother, who, awed and startled as she had been by the death of their

rich relation, had but little grief in her own person to spare for him.

"To be sure somebody is," cried Edward, who of course took the natural line of superiority and virtuous opposition proper to an elder brother; "his own friends are, but we did not know him except just a little, did we, mamma?"

"Ah! but papa *must* have known him," said Charley, wisely; "for nurse told me he had left papa a great deal of money; and all this house was his, though it's ours now—and papa says *uncle* Molyneux. Was papa sorry when he died?"

"Yes, Charley," said Amy, who had at last collected her powers for an answer, and fallen upon one of the harmless sophistries which puzzle and silence children; "but then he was not papa's *real* uncle, you know—not like uncle Joe."

The children said "Oh!" and looked somewhat wondering, though with a puzzled satisfaction. That, of course, made a great difference, though they could not very well have told why.

"But then, mamma, if he left us a great deal of money and made papa very rich?" suggested Charley, who was of an inquiring mind.

"Ah, Charley," said the mamma, only too glad to beg the question and fall into the general moralities of the nursery, "don't you know that nobody can buy love for money? But this is not a proper way to talk either, children. Papa was very sorry for uncle Molyneux; so sorry, that when he came down here he could not sleep at nights; and all the servants were sorry, and his friends, as Edward says, and your uncle at Rookley, and I too; only you are quite little, Charley, and don't understand how people look when they are sorry, and talk like a silly little boy."

"But I do understand," cried Charley, loudly; "I remember——" then the child stopped suddenly, and looked up in his mother's face.

Amy understood only too well what her little son remembered—those days of darkness at the cottage when Rachel mourned for her children. She dared not stay to give way to that weakness; she took his hand and rose up, and the little party went away subdued and quiet. No; no one in

the world had mourned for uncle Molyneux after the fashion of *that* grief.

And this was how they took possession of their new house.

CHAPTER LVIII.

AFTER this great event, a lull of incidents happened in this family, as is very usual after a grand historic period. The births and the deaths seemed alike over; there was no illness, no discouragement in Amy's flourishing nursery, where even the last little tender blossom, the sweet baby Aprile, grew into a tender bloom of health which gladdened the mother's heart. Edward went to Eton, a happy schoolboy; Charley progressed after him, into unquestioned command of all the ponies and dogs about Molyneux, and began to look forward to joining his brother at school. Even Reginald, who was the "delicate" one of the family, grew manful and noisy, and Baby Joe, disdaining that title, exercised a set of lungs which were not surpassed in all Lancashire for fifteen hours in every day, and in every variety of shout, whoop, and yell, known and practised by young gentlemen under the age of seven years. Mrs. Aspinall had made up her mind to it by this time, and no longer thought of protesting against "such a many children," though she still shrugged her shoulders, and put her hands to her ears, and was doubly severe upon the unfortunate underling who left open the door of the housekeeper's room, from which the nursery was completely "audible."

But it had turned out, that "Mrs. Charles" was not the helpless and incapable person she was supposed to be. Quiet and gentle as she was, and difficult as it was to gain full possession of the reins of household management, Amy's housewifely instincts and talents could not remain in abeyance, and she had learned, before now, what differences of domestic economy prevailed in the management of a great house and

a small one. She sighed for Willeham and the cosy little rooms of the cottage many a day ; but, on the whole, had reconciled herself to her new position better than she could have supposed possible, and much better than her husband believed likely. And there were no longer domestic storms to be apprehended ; there was no occasion for them now ; for with the fears and anxiety of his former life, Crawford's evil temper had also disappeared in a great degree. He was even a better man in his prosperity : virtue is so much easier, benevolence so much more natural, when the world goes well with a man, and everything about him prospers.

Mr. Crawford Molyneux made an excellent country gentleman ; he mellowed and ameliorated on his fifteen thousand a year. Very many people would, if they had the chance. It suited *him* very well to be rich, and important, and influential : he could afford to yield a good deal to others now that he had everything his own way. And he ceased to launch fulminations against Amy ; he ceased to threaten her with mysterious pains and penalties if she put in jeopardy their mutual secret. He became a polite husband, moderately kind and very courteous. It was for his own credit that his wife should have a position becoming their place in the world, and that other people should honor her ; and Amy's quiet reserve and gentleness gave her, now in her middle age and with the habits of a mother, and the mistress of a great house, a kind of simple, but not unimpressive dignity, which influenced strangers and reacted upon her husband.

He began to feel more respect for her, than, perhaps, he had ever done before. She was not a cypher in Molyneux Hall ; on the contrary, all the arrangements there had already taken a shade of individuality, very different from the individuality impressed upon them by uncle Molyneux and Mrs. Aspinall. There was less cold grandeur, but there was more warmth, more of that tender brightening atmosphere of friendliness and charity which ought to belong to a family home, than had ever been seen before at Molyneux. Perhaps Crawford's own tastes would have inclined him more to follow the example of his predecessor. But he *was* the father of children after all, the doting father of one child, and had

some humanity and nature in his heart. He did not try to put any hard management of his own in place of Amy's womanly ways. He acknowledged the grace and seemliness, if nothing else, of that natural glow of warmth and comfort which gathered round his home, and he was content to let it go unmolested. He was wise in his generation, for Molyneux Hall drew kinder thoughts towards it in these days both from the rich and poor than it had ever done in the splendid *régime* of uncle Molyneux.

And uncle Molyneux slept sound in his rest, with no flowers nor turf over him, but a marble monument imposing and costly, which strangers came to see. There Art and Commerce, two white Greek figures, stood through all the Hours and Years—placing a medallion of the departed “patriotic agriculturist, successful man of business, and enlightened patron of the arts,” where all the world might see it, and the people who had come to see the monument because it was Chantrey's *sometimes* looked at the name upon its pale tablet, and wondered who this dead Molyneux might be, whose successor had afforded him so wealthy a sepulchre: that was about all that had come of him, that strong, fertile, vivid man, with all his wealth and energy. So far as mortal understanding went, the country and neighborhood spoke of him no longer except in an occasional allusion which the younger generation were slow of understanding, and little Joey in the nursery at the Hall was a more important person now a hundred times than uncle Molyneux. He could not buy love for money, as Amy said in her nursery moral; to do him justice, he had not tried. He had been so busy and strong and full of personal life that he had been very well able to get on without it, and humanity revenged that slight and scorn on him and his memory after he was gone.

While in that little morning room where he died, the only person now perhaps who sometimes thought tenderly and pitifully of his forgotten strength—Amy—established her own retirement, a homely refuge of charitable stores and household accounts, the centre of her quiet benevolences and economics. All her wisdoms and intuitions, poor simple soul, were motherly; she knew this apartment would come to be

a haunted room, a place to fright the children, the mysterious room "where Mr. Molyneux died so suddenly," if it was left to the servants and their marvellous imaginations. So, despite a little awe which she herself felt of the place at first, she made it her own. In the spring there was no such fragrant apartment for miles round as Amy's housekeeping room, with its open windows; there was not such a mass of blossoms and leaves to be seen from any point in the whole county; and there the little woman could sit in peace, overlooking one favorite sweep of lawn, not visible from the front of the house, where the younger children loved to play, and where the small *Aprile* fluttered like a butterfly over the grass and among the trees.

Now was that halcyon time which sometimes falls like a happy heart into the centre of life; in a sweet lull of trouble the mother gained strength and the children flourished and grew. Death and sickness and sadness had left the dwelling; the troubles of her "bairntime" were over for Amy; there were no more delicate infants to watch and tremble over while they lived, or to break her heart for when they died; and the agonies of elder life, perhaps bitterer, if not more dismal,—the cares which come to a family when the children are grown up, when there are half a dozen different wills, haply not often in agreement, when the sons fall into dubious paths, and the daughters choose for themselves, not as their fathers and mothers would have chosen for them, and the household breaks off into many interests instead of one,—were still far enough to have sent no foreboding shadow before them. Sitting in that bright little room—with the voices and the laughter of the three little ones in her ears, with perhaps Edward's school-boy letter to his dearest mamma in her workbasket, and Charley's approaching advent heralded by his loud boyish step ringing through the long passage, Charley who was always full of some eager appeal to his mother's taste or opinion—Amy wondered often to herself, in the quiet of her heart, to find herself so happy. For she was happy in spite of the yearning never satisfied, which would fain have sought her deserted baby through the world,—happy, though that guilt and misery still lay deep at the bot-

tom of her heart. God had mercifully taken off her share of the penalty, she was so unwilling a participator in the crime. The penalty seemed to have glided altogether off both the sinners, and there did not appear a single cloud of retribution gathering in all the horizon of family light and comfort which surrounded Molyneux Hall.

CHAPTER LIX.

WHEN the honorable member for Fantwich secured his long-expected wealth, and regained on that event "for good and all" his good temper, it is not to be supposed that the results of so great a change stopped there. Mr. Crawford Molyneux of Molyneux was a vastly more important and influential person than Mr. Charles Crawford, member for a little Cheshire burgh, with a cottage at Willesham and chambers in the Albany; and, what was almost of more consequence in his political life, he was once more a man to be depended upon; a fact most important to every aspirant for office, whether in the public service or any other. After a time, his erratic period was forgiven and forgotten, and, except a few insulted individuals, people ceased to remember the petulances and rancors of that one short period of his parliamentary career.

When he had been for some time in enjoyment of his new wealth and honors, and when the new atmosphere of Molyneux had begun to be surmised in the neighborhood, and the local heart had melted towards the family of children, and simple charitable mother, who now made that pompous house companionable and friendly, it became known in these regions that the Earl of Bagillt, whether from any pique against Mr. Crawford Molyneux, or simply to dispose of his son, showed a strong inclination to substitute the Honorable George Holywell in the place of the present member, in the obedient and dutiful borough of Fantwich. Before his lordship had the chance of any such proceeding one of the members for one

of the great divisions of Lancashire died, and the friends of Mr. Crawford Molyneux lost no time in calling upon that distinguished public servant to offer himself to the acceptance of this much more important constituency. Crawford was neither timid nor reluctant; he was perfectly able now to afford the increased expenses of such a contest, for a contest—and a hot one—was to be expected; and rather liked the fight. Molyneux Hall was altogether made into a manufactory of cockades; Amy dragged out of her quiet; nurse Patmore plunged into raptures of political excitement, for this good woman, quite unaccustomed to this species of intoxication, took to it wonderfully, and read everybody's address, and all the speeches and all the leading articles in the Lancashire papers, which sudden indulgence went to her head; and Edward and Charley driven out of their wits with delight and importance. The result was a most flattering and entire success, and the triumphant return of the new lord of Molyneux. He had thus a shower of public advantages to increase his private satisfaction. Office—office really worth taking—lay by this time, without any equivocation, within his reach, and with the prosperous present and honorable future which lay before him, it would have been strange to have called Crawford anything but a very fortunate, if not a very happy man.

Happy, too, he was after his fashion, finding his happiness out of himself, as everybody must, and placing its entire well-spring in Edward, his beautiful boy. Edward was not a genius, but he was rapidly growing into the manful, well-developed lad, full of spirit and adventure, whom English fathers love, and had a touch of simple sweetness and candor in his disposition which made Crawford, without knowing it, and indeed without the least idea of complimenting his wife with any share in the boy's virtues, involuntarily think of the pretty, bright, much-beloved young creature whom he had seen for the first time in the old garden at Woodcote, whom he had coveted and made his own, but whom nobody could possibly recognize now in the subdued and quiet mother of Molyneux Hall. A moderately good father to the others, and guilty of positive neglect or unkindness to none of them,

it was Edward alone who made his father's eye brighten, and his heart yearn. The crown of his prosperity was this boy who was its heir; and, man of the world, ambitious, and undomestic as he was, calamity to Edward would have broken Crawford hopelessly down into the dust.

Immediately after his succession at Molyneux, he was absent from home for about a week on a very singular and mysterious errand. His first step was to proceed to town and draw a considerable sum of money in Bank of England notes, by a somewhat roundabout process, that they might not be traced to his hands. Then he set out alone for Ireland, to a country town in a central county, and from thence sent off a bulky packet to "the bank" at Hesse, being the exact sum, with interest, of the gambling debt to that respectable establishment which had driven him some twelve years before from the gay little German town. When this was off his conscience, he breathed more freely, for the desertion of April, which had been everything to Amy, was certainly not more than half of the burden to Amy's husband, who knew better than she did the entire history of the flight and its cause, and understood better than she could possibly do what constituted a debt of honor. When he had discharged this duty, he returned in a more leisurely fashion, by Holyhead and Fawcett, for which place, at that time, he was still member, and from whence he returned home, attributing his absence to the "visit to his constituents" with which it terminated. He was perfectly lightened of his compunctions by this act; "the child" was doubtless safe enough; very happy, there could be little question, with the good people who adopted her, and who had brought her up, without doubt, as their own child. It sometimes struck him, when he had time for exercises of imagination—at least, it struck him a good many times during that journey, when the mere fact of discharging one part of his burden brought the other to his mind—how strange it would be if he were some time suddenly brought in contact with that Mr. and Mrs. Walkingden, with the only child who was not *their* child, but *his*, and whether any secret voice of nature would point the deserted baby out to him; whether it would be safe to permit his wife, even with the shield of

perfect ignorance, to come within sight or reach of her lost child ; whether she retained the name Aprile, which her younger sister now bore. These and a great many other questions came into his mind as he made his lonely journey, but they were mere matter of speculation, he was even able to smile at them, they neither concerned his interests nor touched his heart. The child could not have come to any misfortune, for only people in comfortable circumstances were likely to adopt an infant so left ; and the only child of an old couple who doted upon her,—what better fate could Aprile have ?—a better fate, perhaps, it was than be born the eldest of his large family ; there was nothing to lament in the case, as it had doubtless turned out, of the forsaken child.

So the prosperous man settled into his fortunate and active midday, with all his faculties in energetic occupation, his ambition rising, his reputation increasing. Edward grew, flourished, and was happy ; nothing but comfort and success was in Molyneux Hall, and Crawford, who had settled all his claims with man, and had only God to answer to, for wilful desertion of the first primitive duty of nature, made himself perfectly content and tranquil over that account ; and, as many men have done besides Claverhouse, was not afraid to take God in his own hand.

CHAPTER LX.

THOSE years are the happiest in the family life of which there is least to record, but they are not the most completely adapted for a historic narrative ; so unless we were to copy, humbly and afar off, the most splendid narrative of modern times, and interpolate a statistical chapter after the grand example of Lord Macaulay, showing what was the family expenditure at Molyneux Hall, and whence the income of that great house was derived, and how the property grew in importance and productiveness—a course which we have no

doubt would have a most edifying and satisfactory result, and leave room for many improving reflections, but which our readers, perhaps, might not quite approve of—we see no resource, except to assert on our own veracity that everything went excellently well with the family at Molyneux for a number of years;—that Mr. Crawford Molyneux held office as Under Secretary of State on one occasion, and as President of the Board of Control on another; showed himself a very efficient public servant; had a Right Honorable prefixed to his name; moved in “the highest and most influential circles;” and was a credit to the electors of South Lancashire;—that his very wealth increased, as if Fortune had a mind to overwhelm him with good things;—that the big suburb of the adjoining town, which belonged to him, grew so much into request for villas and fine houses, that almost any price could be got for a site in that much-approved quarter, and the revenues of the proprietor grew apace.

While, in the meantime Edward blossomed into youth and got creditably through the university period of his existence, though somewhat eclipsed there by Charley, who was cleverer than his elder brother, and showed a perverse amount of talent in the very points in which Edward was deficient. That mattered very little, however, either to the father, who still adored his eldest son, or to the world in general. When Edward came home from a six months’ run on the Continent, nearly one and twenty, with a budded moustache, a brown face, and all the unfailing spirits and undaunted strength of that triumphant age, the young man looked perfect and unimprovable to the eyes which loved him best, and indeed was such a young man as it does one good to see. Crawford, whose love for his son had always been a proud affection, rejoiced over Edward now with a fuller satisfaction than anything else in the world gave him, prosperous as he was; and Amy, milder and more timid, was glad at the bottom of her womanly heart to find that the education which had kept her boy so much away from his mother’s side, had not obscured the innocence of his youth. Corrupting influences, if such had been around him, had not corrupted Edward. His blood came as warmly to his cheek, either for youthful pride or

ingenuous shame, as ever came the blushes of a girl; and his heart was fresh in its joyous, innocent pretence of experience and knowledge of the world. He was now a man, with the preparatory stage of education over, standing on the threshold of his life.

Profession or occupation were neither necessary nor to be thought of for Edward; and he had none of his father's inclination for public life. Crawford, who, perhaps, never had another ideal in all his own existence, had pleased his imagination now for years with projects of an ideal perfection of life for Edward; he had made up his mind that his boy should marry early and well, and had already cast his eyes about him in unconscious preliminary investigations among the daughters of great houses where he was familiar, to choose the bride who should appear most worthy of his heir;—most worthy to *him*; for, with the extraordinary forgetfulness to which fathers and mothers, who have themselves set parental opinion at naught on the subject of marriage, still fall into, in spite of experience, he did not fail to count upon Edward's dutiful concurrence in his own opinion, and acquiescence in his choice. Nobody had yet appeared to him quite worthy to be Edward's wife; and he had heard with a little pleased anxiety of the arrival at Bolton Abbey of Lord Patricroft, the old earl's eldest son, whose family was contemporary with his own, and who had a daughter whom Amy's motherly memory declared to be the same age as Charley, and consequently a little younger than Edward. It was impossible to suppose any one more suitable should the young lady happen to be as perfect as all her accessories and antecedents. She was only *Miss Bolton* at the present moment, to be sure, but the earl was old; and Crawford had no objection to greet in his son's wife a Lady Sophia Molyneux. Accordingly the invitation to dinner at Bolton, which shortly after arrived at the Hall, was very acceptable to Edward's right honorable father. He thought he could afford the risk of the young lady's personal qualities proving satisfactory; and worse things might happen than that the young people should fall in love with each other at first sight.

Miss Bolton turned out to be very pretty, as report had already announced her, or rather, exceedingly handsome;

what is vulgarly called a fine woman, with manners and bearing conformable. Lord Patricroft and his family had lived for some years abroad, and the young lady, though only nineteen, was used to conquest. She was somewhat given to saying odd, bold things, some of which were really clever, and all of which looked so, and letting loose her opinion with the most perfect dauntlessness upon every subject under discussion. This, which was partly innocence and partly art, made her, for once at least, a highly attractive and amusing person; and Crawford himself, beguiled into admiration of the confident young beauty, was extremely pleased to see his son by her side, plunging into the pleasant sport of flirtation, and apparently as much contented with his own position and circumstances as his father's heart could desire to see him. Mr. Crawford was no less pleased to perceive that his neighbor, Lady Patricroft, watched the young people with a discreet private regard as complacently as he did. The parents on both sides had evidently made up their minds already as to the desirableness of the match.

There was, however, in the immediate neighborhood of the right honorable gentleman, a very talkative and voluble youth who greatly interrupted his comfort. This was Lord Patricroft's eldest son, the heir of the house, who doubtless felt himself entitled to talk big in the home of his ancestors, and who saw no reason why his pretty sister should say all the good things, and he himself be thrown into the shade. Mr. Bolton had no very good things to say, as it happened, but he had abundance of gossip—gossip not very edifying, the gossip of foreign watering places and wintering places, that odd provincial tattle upon which classic names and travellers' phrases confer a certain fictitious elevation. Mr. Crawford Molyneux bestowed as little attention as possible upon this stream of talk; but the speaker was Lady Patricroft's eldest son, and Lady Patricroft sat next himself and bestowed occasional looks of maternal admiration upon her boy. At length a name occurred in young Bolton's deluge of words which attracted even his unwilling auditor. He began to speak of Hesse, and seeing Crawford's face involuntarily turned towards him at the name, addressed himself almost with eagerness

to a listener so much more important than any he had attracted before.

"Ah, *you* know Hesse, I am sure—charming place when one has a good run of luck, isn't it?—and so gay, and full of fun. I think England detestable, especially Bolton: nothing but smoke and work, and a set of people always in a hurry; but, I say, I heard something very odd in Hesse the last time I was there."

"I have not been abroad for many years," said Crawford, turning away coldly, yet with a thrill of interest which astonished himself, and an eager wonder what this something odd might be.

"And, by-the-by, I never told my mother. Mamma, look here. I've something to tell you, for *you* love gossip if Mr. Molyneux does not," cried the young speaker. "When I was at Hesse last—it's five years ago, and the thing had happened long before, but I suppose they told it to every Englishman for the wonder's sake—I heard the oddest story. Somebody had been there ages ago who had immense luck for a long time and almost broke the bank; then his luck turned, it always does—as most men find out, first or last—and the bank broke *him*, I suppose; at least he ran away. Well, what does the fellow do, but, no end of time after, when everybody had forgotten all about it, comes into his fortune, I suppose, and sends all the money, and a good round sum too, I can tell you, with interest and all that, back to Desjeux. Some of the old *habitués* there got Desjeux himself to tell the story, and it was the greatest fun you ever saw, as good as a play. Desjeux went over the whole concern, you know, stamped and swore and was in despair when the fellow ran away; and then melted and forgave him, and then went up into screams of admiration and bravos when he came to the end. I don't think I ever laughed so much all my life. To be sure, he's a great rascal, but he's such a funny fellow! He swore he would give half the money any day to embrace his dear Monsieur Something or other—I don't believe he could have told the name, or recognized the fellow, for the other half; but if you ever go to Hesse, Mr. Molyneux, do get hold of Desjeux, and make him tell you his grand tale of the honest Englishman; it will be worth your while."

"Well, Percy, it *is* a very odd story," said Lady Patricroft; "I don't wonder the man was affected; I dare say he does not often meet with people so honorable. Was that all? and did nobody even know the Englishman's name?"

"Crantfor, or Crantlay, or something like that, they called it," said young Bolton; "something one couldn't make the least sense of, and some of the other fellows, not Desjeux, said there *was* some more of the story. The man left a baby behind him when he ran away, and there was no end of a row. He had a pretty little wife too, but he didn't leave *her*—altogether it was an odd story, wasn't it, but the fun of the thing was Desjeux."

"And did you hear, Mr. Bolton, what became of the child?" said a voice at some distance. Crawford looked up in sudden consternation—he had forgotten that the story, which made his own heart beat and his veins tingle, was also told in the hearing of his wife. He looked up in dismay. It *was* Amy who had asked the question. She was no longer a young woman, though she still possessed, and always would possess, a certain tender youth of feature, and softness of complexion, which made her look younger than she was. Her face was perfectly pale, even to her lips, as she leant across the table asking that question; but there was none of the wild anxiety and self-betrayal which he feared in her face. It was sadly, pathetically inquiring, and trembled all over with vague lights of suppressed fear and hope; but she was evidently putting the strongest constraint upon herself, and spoke in conscious self-command, without fear of his own presence or any other fear.

"Oh, the child was adopted by somebody," cried the young man, delighted to have attracted so distant a listener, and made a success in conversation. "Some rich queer old English couple at the hotel, who had no children of their own, adopted it and took it away with them—very well for it, poor little thing! for the father who ran away from Desjeux, and the mother who left her baby, could not be parents very much worth having, one would suppose—I should think it was a very good job for the child."

That discomposing signal which breaks so many conversa-

tions, for the withdrawal of the ladies, was given just about that moment, to Crawford's perfect content. He remained standing after the door had closed, scarcely aware what he was about, forgetting Edward and his schemes for the moment, his head throbbing, his heart beating. It was quite impossible to hear that tale with a quiet pulse, totally as every chance of harm to himself had gone out of it. Calmness under the recital was practicable; but he would have been more than man who could have borne it without a strange commotion at his heart. And his wife! From that part of the subject he turned hurriedly to plunge into a political conversation with his next neighbor. What she might do, or think, was beyond his guessing; but he saw trouble growing for himself, and after his long exemption, he was restless and impatient of it. Neither could he overawe Amy now as he had been used to do. He waited with a deep, but silent anxiety for the ending of this evening, with a presentiment that something which should disturb him deeply was in it; some wild womanish plan, or daring foolish expedient, which it would take all his strength to overcome; he had no suspicion of the strange and sudden visitation coming to himself, and not another, which should end in unthought-of misery that already waning day.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE evening passed better than Mr. Crawford Molyneux supposed likely. His wife, to be sure, sat silent and absorbed in the corner of a sofa, with an anxious restless look, her fingers moving uneasily, and every particle of color gone from her face; but she could do little harm now; very little power, except to annoy him, was in *her* hands, and he could bear the annoyance which came from such a source; while, on the other hand, Edward's flirtation progressed most agreeably to all appearance, and when he himself recovered from the

sudden momentary assault which had been too much even for his strong nerves, and which had evidently quite upset his wife's, took a seat beside the young beauty. Miss Bolton made herself so agreeable to Edward's father, that he began to think with extreme satisfaction of so handsome and witty a daughter-in-law. Then she sang, and sang magnificently, not with a girlish ballad pipe, but a voice which would have done no discredit to the opera, and was perfectly and carefully trained. The father could not help thinking to himself with triumph, and with the pleased reflective half-envy of his mature age, what a lucky fellow Edward was!—not wealth alone and excellent position in his own person, but the brilliant good-luck of such a wife—love, beauty, rank, and youth, all the best gifts of fortune: if Edward should only happen to be of the same mind with his father; and at present *that* appeared hopeful enough.

It appeared, however, much to Crawford's annoyance, when they were about to return, that Edward had ordered his horse to be brought to the Abbey, and meant to ride home. The young man was actually gone, indeed, before his father was aware of the arrangement, an alacrity of leave-taking which was not so encouraging as his conduct during the evening had been, and which left to Crawford the unenviable prospect of a *tête-à-tête* drive with his wife. However, there was now nothing for it but to make up his mind to this uncomfortable conclusion, and perhaps the dark road between Bolton Abbey and Molyneux Hall was as good a place as he could have selected for having it out with Amy, and putting down the flood of unreasonable entreaties which he knew were about to be poured upon him. The event happened, of course, as he had foreseen; scarcely had they emerged from the Abbey gates when Amy threw herself on her knees before her husband, begging him, by all the arguments she could find or imagine, to reclaim the lost child. Somebody had adopted their deserted baby, somebody whom it might be possible to trace and discover still. There was no one in the way now to make any investigations dangerous. For God's sake, for the sake of all those hopes which were higher than this world, for the love he bore his other children,

would he seek out, would he give *her* his permission to search out, Aprile, and recover the first-born child?

It was a moving appeal, and one which even he could not listen to without agitation. He raised his wife from the attitude which she would scarcely relinquish, and soothed her with gentleness and kindness. He pointed out to her, in the most plausible and convincing way, the extreme unlikelihood of finding, with so slender a clue, the refuge of Aprile. How was he to set about it? what could he do, what could any one do, after a lapse of two-and-twenty years? It was true he might set inquiries on foot, open their domestic concerns to public gossip, and bring heavy censure upon them both; but he appealed to herself to say what success was probable. A rich old English couple, without children, had adopted their child. If he himself went to Hesse and ran the risk of recognition there, the best that he could hope to find was some German travestie of a forgotten English name, something that would simply lead them astray. What could he do? It was miserable to think, he acknowledged, that their own child might be within their reach, and they ignorant of her; he was willing to take any steps which Amy could suggest, but he implored her to consider it well. It was natural she should be greatly agitated, as indeed he was also, by what they had heard that day; but what—with a due consideration of the chances of success, their own position, and the interests of their other children, he appealed to her own judgment—what could they do?

Amy was quite unprepared for this line of argument, and unable to defend herself against the unaccustomed kindness and confidence of her husband. When she had pleaded with faltering earnestness every argument she could think of, and suggested some wild womanish expedients, totally impracticable, for finding out the unknown protectors of her child, she yielded at last, wringing her hands in a despairing helplessness. Then Crawford yielded also. He said,—

“Let me but see Edward settled, and we will go together to Hesse, and try everything that is possible. Don’t suppose there is any obstacle on my part; but I have set my heart, my dear Amy, on seeing our boy happy and with a good start in life. Is not that your interest as much as mine? Let

Edward's future life but show itself a little more clearly, let us but ascertain how he is going to spend his early life, and we will go together to recover if possible our other child."

"But Edward is so young," faltered poor Amy, under her breath.

"Very young; but consider what a safeguard to youth is a virtuous attachment—a suitable marriage!" cried the virtuous and exemplary father. "How many temptations it keeps a young man out of. If I had known you ten years sooner than I did, Amy, I might have been a very different man."

And Crawford sighed. Perhaps it was a real sigh—perhaps he did think in sincerity that it would have been better for himself in his early days to have been a young married man, very fond of a young wife, than to have been the gay Charley Crawford, who, in a fit of weariness and world-disgust, married that simple child out of Woodcote, and carried her away to the wandering, reckless life which ended, at Hesse, in that catastrophe which had marred the lives of both. Yes; very likely it was a sincere sigh—he wanted to do better for his son, and the poor little woman by his side, confused and puzzled by so strange an utterance, even flattered, though she knew so much better, by that unprecedented compliment to herself, was subdued and could say nothing. When Edward was settled! Such wisdom as Amy had gathered during her life would have led her to leave her boy alone till nature put such speculations, always early enough suggested by that restless mother, into his own head; but it was strange to feel herself behind her husband in anxiety for Edward's happiness, and she was silenced in spite of her better judgment. When Edward was settled!—a definite period—she was to be free at last to go forth into the world to seek her lost baby, a pilgrim of love; and she thanked God for the prospect, though it was distant, and hushed her sick heart, as best she could, into content.

Crawford was wonderfully satisfied with his rapid success in quieting his wife. He reached his own house with a great deal of complacency and an actually increased regard for the little woman whom he had found so very easily vanquished by this new instrument of kindness. It was accordingly in a

very propitious mood that he met his son, who had reached home before them, and was strolling up and down the terrace in the pleasant gloom of the autumn evening, smoking his cigar and enjoying himself, as he said, after the fatigues of his first grand dinner. The father and mother joined him there. The night was dark, but brightened by the last half of the harvest moon; lights gleamed here and there over the flat country; an odor of dews and growing trees came faint but pleasant to replace the sweeter perfumes of summer; and the soft air of itself was a pleasure to the sense, so cool, and fresh, and sweet.

"Fatigues!" said the gratified father. "When I was your age, I did not think a flirtation with a very pretty girl by any means fatiguing. You seemed to me to be enjoying yourself mightily and making hay while the sun shone, with praiseworthy diligence, eh, Ned?"

"Not I, sir! though, of course, when he is doing no harm, a man may as well amuse himself," said Edward, with the saucy confidence of his youth. "She is very pretty, to be sure, and clever, I suppose, and has certainly a wonderful voice. I dare say, if she was a *prima donna*, and it was quite an improper and reprehensible proceeding, I might very likely fall in love with her," he continued, laughing, and with a half blush; "but not when she is Miss Bolton, or Lady Something Bolton, our next neighbor, and highly eligible. No, sir; I assure you that is not my taste at all; she is not in my way."

"And pray might one inquire what *was* your taste, after all your experience?" said Crawford, half amused, and half disappointed, taking this rapid deliverance for what it was worth, and pleased with his son, whatever he might choose to say.

Edward laughed, threw away his cigar, and drew his mother's arm within his own.

"I'll do as you did, sir," he cried, with that tender filial gallantry which happily makes up to so many women for the neglects of their youth; "I'll marry somebody as like my mother as possible; if there is any one like her remaining to be found."

Had it been daylight, or even now had any one been watching Crawford, the sudden extraordinary crimson which flushed over his face and the sudden pallor which succeeded it, could not have passed without observation.

He said "Ah!" with a sharp accent, after his son's light words, and staggered like a man who had received a sudden blow. But Edward and his mother had continued their walk along the terrace, gliding out of the shade into the moonlight and back again, like two visionary figures; and this shock, whatever it was, passed unobserved. When they had returned to within a short distance of him, he called to them with an altered voice, that he had some letters to write, and would see them later in the little drawing-room; and so turned and went quickly away, before his wife and son were near enough to see his face. They remained there out of doors for some time, talking happy, confidential talk, which charmed Amy out of her troubles, and agreeing that the head of the house had a great deal too much fatigue and worry, and that he must be prevailed upon to rest.

"I don't know any man who should be so independent as the governor," said Edward; "and look! there go the lights into the library. I shouldn't wonder if he sat up with these said letters half the night."

And then the mother, timid, untravelling woman, as she was, broached a bold proposition on her own account, and thought it would be very pleasant if papa could be persuaded to take change of scene for a month or two and go abroad. She should like it very well herself; and then the children—but here Amy's eye caught the steady light in her husband's window, and she faltered slightly. It did not matter. Edward was heartily glad to take up the suggestion and make it his own. To be sure! the governor had not been abroad for no end of time. The very thing to amuse him, of course, and save him from killing himself with overwork!

So they talked upon the terrace unawares, while the cloud no bigger than a man's hand had already risen upon the firmament, and Crawford by himself met the heavy hand of unlooked-for retribution, and fell prostrate at the first stroke.

CHAPTER LXII.

HE sat there in the library, with a shaded lamp before him, leaving his face and the great noble room in shadow, and throwing light only upon a limited bright circle of the table where it stood. But there were no letters or materials for writing within that line of light, only his arms leaning heavily, and supporting his head. It was well that nobody saw that face, ghastly with a horrible suggestion, that forehead on which heavy drops of pain were bursting, those eyes contracted and shaded with his hand, as though to shut out some haunting apparition. What strange effect was this produced by these light words, which meant so little? what extraordinary sudden revulsion from all his fatherly complacency, and the brightness of his anticipations? He looked ten years older than when he stepped from his carriage half an hour ago—ten years older, and a man upon whom, to the boot, some grand irremediable misfortune of life had fallen: what did it mean?

It meant that Crawford himself, by his own guilty imagination, or the devil for him, ever ready, kept whispering one frightful suggestion without ceasing into his ear, one question hideous to answer, from which he could not escape. Whom should Edward marry if the boy were sent forth by himself into the world? Whom should he fall in love with, and woo and seek to win, when he exercised that private choice of his own, which Crawford learned now, or remembered by a sudden intuition, every young man is like to exercise, let his father say what he will. Whom? Good Heaven, that he should have lived all these years, and learned all the perversities of fate, and trained up his boy with so much care and pains, yet never have thought of that deadliest of dangers! He had trembled to the depths of his heart, lest Edward should know the secret of his own early life; but with a dreadful human short-sightedness, had never thought of that possibility, so much more horrible, which burst upon him in unmi-

tigated darkness now. Edward who would marry somebody like his mother, if such was to be found. Who but the lost Aprile, the sister of his own blood, if he were left to himself, in his heedless, happy ignorance—who but she could be the young man's choice? Somebody like his mother! For an instant there appeared to Crawford, standing out from the gloom of his thoughts, with a strange wistful compunction of late tenderness, surrounding the lovely visionary figure, that prettiest Amy who had beguiled for a moment his own worldly heart. The charm of that youth, that bloom, that sweet simplicity, remembered in one vivid flash of memory, struck him to the soul. Miss Bolton, with her high-bred beauty, her grace, her accomplishments, her wit and daring, could never have touched himself with the sweet surprise of that unexpected spell; and how could he judge Edward, if not by the experience of his own youth? Then his mind glanced aside for the moment to the other Aprile, his little daughter, who had gradually won her way even into his affections, and in whom all the early fascination of her mother's youth seemed to be budding. What should the lost one be, the unknown daughter woman-grown, the first-born, her mother's excellency, and the beginning of her strength? He crushed his hands together with the grasp of despair. What good angel would prevent their meeting, these two, who, in ignorance of each other, ought never to meet? To whom could he appeal to prevent that dreaded encounter? rather, what devils of mischief would not set their wiles in motion to bring the children together? and what could *he* do, the occasion of it all, to keep their meeting harmless, and their hearts pure?

He sat in his miserable solitude, the rich, fortunate, happy man, with his great possessions and his prosperous children, bowed to the very earth with that sudden anguish. It seemed to him that nothing could prevent it—that they must meet—must love each other—must have their young hearts broken, and their souls scathed with a ghastly shadow of almost crime. That was the lightest possibility that his fears could form; the darker alternative was, that Edward, unknown to him, should rush, as he himself had done, into a private marriage, and be lost in that hopeless unredeemable misery, before his father

could interfere. No wonder that the dews of agony hung heavy on his forehead, and that his mind refused even to think in that sudden horror; but strange, most strange, a dreadful delusion of rest and confidence, that he should never have thought of it before.

In this great shock and misery, none of the popular fancies about the voice of nature came to comfort Crawford. He could not console himself that the sacred unknown tie of kindred might preserve these two, by a holy intuition, from the merest thought which could run counter to their real relationship. He was a hard man, insensible to these refinements of natural sentiment, and the sudden revelation of this unthought-of danger came upon himself with a certain malevolence which made him superstitious. He could have supposed that some ghostly unseen enemy, preparing a certain game against him, had drawn a sudden veil aside, and permitted him, in frightful derision, when it was no longer possible to make head against it, to see the play. This was how it struck him, that unthought-of stroke, for which he was totally unprepared. He had expected to spend an uncomfortable evening, galled even by the recollection of the careless contempt with which his neighbor's foolish young son had spoken of "the fellow," and the adventure at Hesse, and teased by the unreasonable desires and yearnings of his wife; but he had not expected this sudden thunderbolt falling direct and unescapable upon his own guilty head. His light burned half through the night, as Edward had prophesied it would, but it was not the business of the State which kept sleep from his eyes; and when, with a sudden apprehension of being disturbed then by some early servant, he stumbled to his room in the dim dawn of the morning, his face was white with something beyond weariness, a ghastly, wakeful watching was in his eyes, opposed to the very supposition of slumber. Sleep! when only *he* knew the horror that was gliding towards his house—when only he was aware of the hideous danger that menaced his son—when still it might be possible, by a watch incessant, and vigilance without intermission, to shield that evil off. Struck thus suddenly in the very stronghold of his affections, was it likely that he could ever sleep again?

But while *he* watched, Edward slept without a spectre in all *his* future, and Edward's mother slept and dreamed dreams of such happy import as she had never known before. Dreams of sailing up that dismal, well-remembered river, going to search out and claim her child. Dreams of finding Aprile, not a woman, another woman's daughter, but still her own, her baby, the baby for which every feminine heart, however old, retains a longing to the end. Thus she lay, with smiles moving upon her face, when her husband, with his gray countenance in the gray light of the morning, paused to look upon her rest. The last time they had spoken on this subject, many, many years ago, the day on which uncle Molyneux died, Amy had taken the whole guilt of their joint sin upon herself, and he had turned in contempt from her womanish self-accusation to imagine what the world would say. Now he saw the subject in another light—God, who knew best which was most to blame, had released *her* from the burden, and bound it with cruel bonds, which cut to the soul, upon his own shoulders. God or the devil, which was it? He could not tell, or would not, in the fierce rage and misery which possessed him; but threw himself on his bed, setting down unawares beside him the ineffectual candle which he had carried, and which still burned faintly in the growing day; and hopeless of sleep, hopeless of oblivion, steeling himself to meet the anguish which he could not escape, covered his eyes from the light, and was still in his wretchedness, waiting for the livelier sufferings of the morning, and the refreshed gigantic care which should meet him with the full life of a new day.

CHAPTER LXIII.

IN spite, however, of his misery, Crawford did sleep, though he scarcely knew when or how ; and awoke, though still with all the horrors of the previous night full in his mind, with collected strength and courage somewhat revived. He rose even with a certain activity of spirit, roused and strained by a new motive, which, painful as it was, still found a stronger inducement to exertion than any other in the world. The daylight aspect of things did not sicken him to the heart as it had done in his last heavy interval of suspense and self-torment. He was older now, and things affected him differently. He looked out upon the sunny landscape with a profound depression which still did not affect either his reasoning powers or the energy of his mind. Somehow a different light seemed to be thrown upon every thing by his sudden panic—he could fancy he saw deeper, farther below the surface than ever he had done before. He had been sceptical, like many another prosperous man, of the retributions of moral government, and had smiled at the fictions of “poetic justice.” Was there something more in that poetic justice, that moral punishment, than his philosophy had witted of? The time was past when any man could injure him in his worldly prospects, or glide his inheritance out of his expectant hands ; but the time had not yet come when possible penalties of guilt were over for him. There it stood threatening, that lowering hideous shadow—not loss of land or loss of reputation, but something which struck infinitely deeper ; there it stood, overclouding the happiness of that great prosperous house. Guilt, long hidden, long forgotten, but only that it might choose more surely, at the most poignant moment, the spot to point its fiery sting and strike its dart. Looking abroad upon the world, where many another man sinned and suffered, he surmised for the first time that perhaps this dark principle of responsibility lay with other secrets beneath that smiling surface, and that whether or no the world ever perceived it, his sin one time or another found every criminal out.

It was but a momentary glance of the philosophic eye, which had come to him in some degree with his ripened years. More immediate concerns engrossed him immediately; before he ventured to go down to the family breakfast-table, which was so cheerful a table now-a-days, he took an hour of anxious thought to consider what he should do. That sudden shock of fear had enlightened Crawford more completely as to the invariable temper and waywardness of youth, especially in the concerns of the heart, than anything else could possibly have done. He saw now how very unlikely it was that Edward, in his flush of youth and high spirit, would accept the bride whom his father, and not himself, should choose—and wondered at his own brief and comfortable delusion. But until Edward was married, any degree of peace or rest was absolutely impossible to his father; that was certain. In these circumstances, was it best only to watch, and confine his agonies of silent anxiety in his own bosom, or to warn his son to such an extent as was possible against the dangers which might lie in wait for him? The question was as difficult and delicate as could be imagined. To tell Edward that somewhere in the world there was a girl bearing the name of Walkinden, the only child of a rich old couple to whom no inducement and no regard was to draw his inclinations—was not that more likely, judging by ordinary rules of youthful nature, to send Edward off in full and eager pursuit of her, than to have any other result? Yet he was a dutiful son, and had surely confidence enough in his father to believe even the existence of the obstacle which could not be explained to him. Who could tell? It is only results which justify the wisdom of the wisest, and on a point so momentous and so delicate, who could decide whether silence or admonition would in the end be the better?

And it was all the more necessary to decide upon this question at once, because Edward was about setting out on a visit to his relatives in Yorkshire, where his aunt Gerty was now a full-bloomed clerical matron, with an increasing family, and Everard Fielding was Mr. Dean. Of all people in the world, perhaps the last whom Crawford could have dreamt of taking even partially into his confidence, were his sister

and her husband. He could not move himself even so far as to warn Gerty that he had "views" for Edward, and to beg her co-operation in keeping the young man out of the way of dangerous beauties. For to tell the truth, at this moment Crawford's ambition had yielded to his fears—he would have been glad to compromise the matter and accept any young woman whatever, not notably deficient in ordinary qualities, who could be honestly proved not to be Aprile, for Edward's wife.

After breakfast, at which Edward, by way of contrast apparently to his father's extreme seriousness, appeared in very high spirits, Crawford took advantage of a proposed expedition to a distant point of the estate, which Edward and he were to make together, to enter upon this difficult interview with his boy. They were, however, already a long way advanced upon their return, before he found courage equal to the undertaking. It was then late in the September afternoon, approaching sunset. They had ridden far, and their horses and themselves were equally yielding to the fatigue of a long course; they had just entered a level line of road, stretching as far as they could see, with trees on either side, and the red level evening rays throwing long gleams of light and gigantic stalking shadows before them. Their horses had fallen into a walk, and themselves into silence: now was the time if ever. The evening quiet lay over the whole country,—scarcely a sound, but the few voices of birds, the fall now and then of an occasional leaf, the noise of their horses' feet upon the road, and the distant echo of the groom who followed. The father cleared his throat a great many times, and had *almost* spoken often enough before he really did it. At last, in as light a tone as he could assume, he made a beginning, as anxious almost to conceal the importance of his subject as to impress that importance, under a disguise of ordinary fatherly advice, upon his boy.

"So you were not so much struck with Miss Bolton, Ned, as I supposed," he said, with assumed carelessness, turning his head aside, and concealing under a mock admiration of the evening effect of sunshine, the anxiety which Edward in his ignorance suspected as little as any other troublous thing in the world.

"She's very handsome, sir, and very clever, and all that sort of thing, but she would not do for me," said Edward, with his half-saucy, half-bashful laugh. "My tastes will never lead me to a *grande dame*."

"Your aunt Gertrude was a *grande dame*—is, I should say. Gerty keeps her good looks wonderfully well," said Crawford; "but to speak seriously, my dear boy, I should be very glad to know that your taste had led you to make a choice which I could approve of. Nothing that I know would give me so much pleasure as to see you happily settled in life."

Edward laughed again, with a cordial, cheerful sound, which rang into all the echoes, and almost seemed to repeat itself in an additional note of gladness from the surrounding country, to his father's loving but anxious imagination.

"I can't conceive, sir, why you should be in such haste about my prospects," said Edward. "You are still a young man, and there is a lot of us. No chance of the failure of an heir to Molyneux, whatever might happen to me. There's Charley, and Reginald, and Joe, all strong and hearty, not to speak of Aprile, who would make a sweet little heiress: why shouldn't the poor fellows have their chance?"

"This is too serious a subject to joke about," said Crawford. "I am not surprised that *you* find it amusing, Ned. You are young enough certainly, but it has occupied a great deal of my thoughts lately, and—and—I believe I may say of your mother's also. I have reasons of my own for believing early marriages most conducive to happiness."

"Very well, sir," said Edward, with mock seriousness. "I hope you have always found me ready to do my duty. Since England and you and my mother expect it of me, I shall certainly do my best to fall in love at once."

A momentary smile crossed Crawford's face, a smile which only seemed to show the steady seriousness, almost beyond gravity, of its expression.

"And, my dear boy," he said, with a little trembling, which seemed to Edward quite incomprehensible, and beyond explanation, in his voice, "I have something to say to you in respect to that. You are not to fall in love with the first pretty girl you meet, Edward; you must take Molyneux and

your future position a little into account; Miss Bolton now, for example."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, sir, not another word about Miss Bolton," cried Edward, interrupting his father with some impatience. "She would drive me out of my wits in a week!"

"Well, well, we shall say nothing more about *her*, in that case," said the accommodating father, suddenly recollecting, on the spur of the moment, one most evident and prominent particular of his case, which strangely enough had not struck him before through all his cogitations. "One pledge, however, I must exact from you, Edward. You must promise me under no circumstances either to make love to, or to marry, a woman older than yourself."

Another peal of laughter from his son this time somewhat jarred upon Crawford's excited nerves.

"My dear father! do you think me crazy?" cried Edward, scarcely able to command his voice. "What on earth could induce *me* to marry a woman older than myself? You don't suppose *I* am likely to sell myself for money, or—or that sort of thing, sir? I think you may quite trust me on that score without any pledge."

"You misunderstand me, my boy," said the father, with a slight paternal sharpness. "You may believe I had no fear of your marrying an old woman, but you might quite possibly encounter a very pretty girl, Edward, who had counted a year or a couple of years more in the world than you have done. Now that, you must understand, I positively object to. It is in such a case that I require your promise. I am not surprised that you should find it ridiculous, but I have a reason for what I say."

"I should be sorry to appear to ridicule anything you say, sir," cried Edward, with a blush of eager compunction; "but," he added, with an irrepressible laugh, "wouldn't it be a whimsical beginning to a courtship, father, to ask for a copy of the young lady's baptismal register; and rather a serious preliminary too, if it should happen to come to nothing, after all?"

"My dear boy," said Crawford, "have your laugh, you

have a right to it; but don't forget what I have said. There is another thing, Edward,"—he continued with some agitation, for he was confused by the failure of this suggestion, and by the almost absurd air which it threw upon his grave concern,—“a much more particular restriction which I would fain put upon you. There is one family in the world which I should like you never to have anything to do with, Ned. Can I trust that you will not be moved by the contradiction natural at your years, if I go so far as to name them? May I rely upon you that you will have no perverse wish to seek them out?”

“You may certainly rely upon me to do nothing which I know you to be seriously opposed to, father,” said Edward, with a wondering, troubled face.

“Then I will put so much confidence in you,” said Crawford, hurriedly, aware of his own imprudence, and perceiving that he had committed himself, yet feeling that he had gone too far to draw back. “I cannot tell you where they live, nor anything about them, Edward, and I cannot explain to you the fixed and unalterable obstacle that exists upon any interchange, even of friendship, between that family and ours. There is but one child—one daughter; so far as I know,” said Crawford, with an involuntary faltering of voice and droop of his head—“a very fascinating and pretty girl—I—I believe so, I imagine as much; and a father and mother older, I suppose, than one would expect *her* parents to be. I believe them to be wealthy, and live in retirement, I cannot inform you where or how. Their name is Walkingden; remember Walkingden; it is not a very common name, Edward: if you should ever come in contact with a family bearing this name and answering this description, remember that any intercourse you may have with them is at the risk of embittering my life and breaking my heart!”

So much real feeling was in these words—feeling indeed intense and incomprehensible—that Edward was awed into momentary silence. When at last he answered, it was with his hand stretched out to grasp his father's, which responded with a hurried and agitated grasp.

“You may be sure, sir,” cried Edward, “that not for all

the pretty girls in the world should I do either the one or the other."

For the moment the effect which his appeal had produced was everything that the father could desire, and they proceeded for some time in silence, Crawford dizzy with his own restrained excitement, and with a superficial elation over his successful effort, rejoicing now in the frankness which he had feared imprudent, and too fully occupied with his own thoughts and anxieties to make any attempt to continue the conversation; while Edward was sufficiently employed in wonder what could be the possible cause of this prohibition. By-and-by, however, a certain sense of the ludicrous in being thus defended against all intercourse with a family of which he knew nothing but the name, infringed upon the young man's gravity. He burst out at length into a sudden laugh.

"After all, father, for anything romantic," he exclaimed, suddenly, after that long interval, "Walkingden is anything but a suitable name."

They were by this time in sight of Molyneux.

"Hush!" cried Crawford, raising his hand with imperious agitation, "let me never hear the name again from your lips, and never mention it, nor this conversation, in the presence of your mother. Do not forget! it is of the utmost consequence that you should remember what I say."

CHAPTER LXIV.

A FEW days after this important conversation, Edward set out for Yorkshire, dismissing it with happy carelessness from his memory, save in the chance moments when, for lack of other interesting matter, it occurred to him to stir his mind to renewed wonder. What possible motive could his father have for so solemn an injunction?—never, so far as he could remember, had anybody of this name been known to his family, or had anything to do with the household. It must

be a bitter animosity indeed, Edward thought, which could continue over all his own lifetime without any visible opportunity of renewing itself; and the idea that it was his father who entertained such a feeling, was not comfortable to the affectionate son. Then there might be other hypotheses to account for it less agreeable still; for Edward had not been at a public school and university without hearing stories which conveyed more enlightenment than edification to his mind. Possibly there was some ugly shadow of his father's life connected with this family; possibly the wife on some unlucky occasion had crossed Mr. Crawford's path; possibly the daughter—— No; Edward did not stumble upon a peradventure so closely approaching the truth. When he had come so far, he shook off the whole speculation with filial, indignant self-annoyance. Why should he try to spy out his father's secret? Why investigate the trouble thus betrayed to him, which he never had, nor could have suspected to exist? His father had warned him, at an evident cost of pain and mortification to himself, and should he repay that generous exertion by prying into his father's history, and endeavoring to find out the one private chapter which he chose to conceal? Edward spurned the thought and banished it, bidding manful defiance to his curiosity, and was happy enough fortunately, and had enough to do with his own enjoyments, his youth and his light heart and unclouded prospects, to make it a very easy thing for him to forget.

As for Mr. Crawford Molyneux, he had not been easy to have his son out of his sight for an hour at a time since that day. He had done all he could to put off the projected visit to Hawarden; but he could not interpose his positive authority to prevent it, nor would have done so, if he could; partly for very shame, and partly because he knew well enough how utterly futile it was to think of putting restraint upon the personal freedom of Edward, or of any such young man. If he could not trust to his son's honor, candor, and affection, he certainly had no other hope to trust to; but still it was with a pang and thrill of indescribable anxiety that he accompanied his son to the little Molyneux railway station and saw him go away.

The train was very full, and Edward, as it happened, could

only find a place in a carriage occupied by two young ladies, who were travelling alone attended by their maid. One of them, whom Crawford himself caught a glimpse of for a moment, attracted his own experienced glance a second time with involuntary interest, even in the act of bidding his son good-bye. She was a shadowy, pensive-looking girl, sad either by nature, circumstances, or that "prodigal excess" of happiness, which makes youth love melancholy—most probably it was the latter; for there was a little innocent, sentimental air about the pretty face which peeped shyly for a moment from the window, and then was hastily bent over her book. No dangerous associations were in these features, and Crawford caught himself almost wishing—as he watched the train glide away, forgetting all the high ambitions which he had formed for his eldest son, and that, perhaps—nothing more likely—this might be only some poor governess hastening to a new situation, or curate's daughter equally ineligible—that Edward *would* fall in love with that first pretty face, and free him once for all from his misery. Even a love affair, which ended in nothing, the wary father thought, would at least be a temporary relief to himself and distraction of Edward's thoughts; and, for this purpose, Mr. Crawford Molyneux had not the slightest objection that Edward should take full advantage of his opportunities with this or any other pretty girl. He had been roused out of that former dream of his prosperity which beheld all the world abetting his own good fortune, and scarcely a calamity possible to him; he had learned to tremble before the possible approach of the greatest of misfortunes, but still it was only himself and his son whom he cared for—nobody else with any depth or sincerity in all the world.

So he went back, slowly walking, to the Hall, his mind full of this one train of thought. He had warned his boy, he had opened to Edward's imagination a hint of something in his own life which he did not choose to disclose more fully; so far he had gone, and with all the immediate effect he hoped. But whether that effect would last—whether curiosity, the inherent quality of youth, might not tempt his son to investigate further, to find out the one spot forbidden in the world,

and to see the one woman whom he was prohibited to see—that was a very different question. Then he remembered well, in the experience of his age, how young men reason; how inclination gets loose and goes too far, and then summons a plausible array of cause and motive to justify it; how the youthful hero sets himself in the way of temptation, yet is strong in the consciousness of *intending* no mischief, and how successful is that natural casuistry which after the father's caution has been disregarded, finds out that the father must have exaggerated, and did not, could not, have meant what he said. He knew it all well enough, this man growing old who had been young, and was once the gay Charley Crawford of Rookley; nobody could have enlightened him more as to the disobediences and wilfulness of youth, than he could have told himself. His comfort was a strange one; a comfort, perhaps, not always very secure, which doubtless many such fathers had taken before. He said to himself, with a certain pathetic repentance and self-abasement,—

“*I never had my boy's innocence and virtue; Edward is not like me!*”

But he could not make an end to his self-torments with that conclusion; new aggravations of thought returned upon him from time to time. How could *he* tell where the lost April was? How could he venture to assure himself that she had remained all these years with the good people who had adopted her at first? He had never made an inquiry, never so much as tried to ascertain if they had really brought up the child, or if indeed they lived. If they were old people as he had supposed, might they not have died years ago, leaving his deserted daughter to somebody else's care, or upon the cold charity of the world? Might not she be the poor governess toiling somewhere, without home or connection in the world for her cheerless head? It was even the greatest chance if she bore the name of Walkingden; how could he tell what the poor girl might have called herself—where she might be—what she might be doing? Alas! his troubles were but coming, growing; his anxieties increased by a marvellous replication, and multiplied each other. He hastened home to his library, to seek there the vast London Directory and find,

if he could, the name of Walkingden: something could be done at least to set *this* question at rest; and that something would still the restlessness of his uneasy mind until he heard from his son. Edward had been a good boyish letter writer, and proud of his encouraged correspondence with his father, a privilege which none of the others shared with him; and Edward had no secrecy in his candid mind. He could not hesitate to mention frankly everybody who interested him. After all, trust in Edward was his father's only stay.

While in the meantime Edward travelled very comfortably towards the railway junction where the Yorkshire "line" crossed the one on which the Molyneux station was, and was extremely pleased to find that his young fellow-travellers were going the same way, and that he could contrive again to share the same carriage. Two very pretty girls, sisters, but as unlike each other as possible, with an old French maid very watchful, kind, spare, and ugly, carefully attending and guarding them. Edward thought he had fallen upon highly agreeable society, and that never train made such annoying and needless haste before.

CHAPTER LXV.

WHEN Mr. Crawford Molyneux was undisturbed in his library, after dinner that evening—when the house was quiet, and no likelihood of interruption remained—he opened the one only article of furniture which he had brought with him from the Willesham cottage, a writing-table which he still frequently used, and took from it two old yellow papers. There they had lain for all these years, preserving, in their black German type and paltry paper, the only clue which he had to the possible position of his deserted child. He was not so fresh in his acquaintance with the language now as when he had newly left Hesse, and his eyes were older. He had to put on spectacles to read once more the paragraph which, indifferent as

he was to the infant's fate, had still clung to his memory, and which he scarcely required to see again, so clearly did he remember its every word. There it stood, however, as distinct as blurred type and bad printing left it—"Mons. Samuel Walkingden, de Kensington." He turned with disgust from the accompanying details, which he remembered so clearly to have read before, and crushed the paper back again into its drawer. He had already sought the assistance of the Directory, and had found there that a Mr. Samuel Walkingden still lived at Kensington, in Myrtle Villa. So far the way was sufficiently clear, and it now only remained for him to seek some expedient by which he could ascertain whether they had still retained, and had brought up, the child.

He went to town next day "on business," and the same evening penetrated into those remote borders of Kensington where Myrtle Villa was situated. He had not been able to invent any errand by which he could introduce himself unsuspected at the house, and indeed, when he had reached its immediate neighborhood, felt himself so entirely overpowered with mingled eagerness and hesitation, that he could not have ventured without self-betrayal under that roof. Careless as he had always been about his unknown daughter, nature touched him in spite of himself; and the thought of suddenly finding himself in the presence of one already mature in full developed youth, with an individual character and identity of which he was totally ignorant, who notwithstanding was his own child, had more effect upon him than he could have supposed possible. The house was exactly such a house as was to be expected from its name,—a commodious, square, comfortable habitation, surrounded by a garden and garden-wall, and fronting to a narrow road, which was formed on either side by exactly similar enclosures; and passing between two lines of blooming gardens and cheerful houses, was as dull a bit of road as could be imagined, and as unlovely.

Mr. Crawford Molyneux had left his horse and groom some distance off, and walked once or twice slowly, and with hesitation, down this street. He could not mistake Myrtle Villa, which bore its name in the plainest English characters on the doorposts; and as he lingered along with a hesitation

quite novel to him, he could not help making a pause before the gate, which was half formed of an iron railing, and through which the garden, large for these quarters, fragrant, blooming, and beautifully kept, was visible. With a tingle of expectation, he looked, expecting that some pretty figure might perhaps be visible among the flowers, and that thus innocently, and without observation, he might make acquaintance with the outward aspect of his child. But there was no one to be seen but a gardener watering the flowers, with a distant prospect of a stout old gentleman reading a newspaper at an open window.

An aspect of quiet wealth was about the whole place ; it differed strangely, no doubt, from Molyneux—differed as much as the benevolent, tender-hearted, homely old man at that dim window differed from the right honorable gentleman who looked in at the grating of his door. While Crawford stood, half subdued by a momentary impulse of seeking admittance, and delivering himself from his fears by the most open and manifest road which remained to him, that of simply claiming his daughter, he was disturbed by the sound of voices behind. He turned round hastily, unwilling to be perceived in that position. The speakers were two ladies, who had encountered each other at a few steps' distance. One of them a woman about his own age, portly, comely, and richly dressed ; the other of the parasitic class which attaches itself naturally to the wealthy inhabitants of such localities. It was the latter personage whose voice had roused him ; she was speaking loudly enough to be quite audible, greeting with demonstration her dear Mrs. Walkingden. Crawford went slowly on to pass them, looking with natural interest at the person who bore that name. She was older than Amy certainly, his own contemporary, but not too old to be Aprile's mother, or to make the relationship at all singular. She was bearing very calmly a flood of inquiries. Did she feel quite strong—quite able to walk after the bad headache she had the other night ? "And how is good Mr. Walkingden," continued the effusive questioner, "and your sweet daughter ? I hope *quite* well."

"Very well, thank you," said Mrs. Walkingden. "They went down into Yorkshire the other day on a visit to their

uncle, my husband's brother. The house feels very dull without them, as you may suppose. I suppose Mr. Walkingden and I will be driven to follow them one of these days. We don't feel like ourselves in so quiet a house."

Crawford could not hear any more without making a positive pause, and so went on in a new access of agitation. Gone down into Yorkshire!—gone into the very neighborhood doubtless where his boy was! God help him! "Your sweet daughter,"—who could that be but Aprile, Amy's baby? Her father could no more doubt the fascinations and sweetness of that child, than he doubted who she was. He had no longer the least uncertainty upon the subject. They *had* brought up the infant, fostered her, cared for her, made her their own; and a certain envy mingled with the vehement emotion which made his course so rapid down that dull line of street. She had gone into Yorkshire, where, with all the spite of fate, Edward too had been carried yesterday. The danger was no flight of imagination, but imminent, actual, already assailing his innocent, ignorant son—his son!—his children!—for were not both of them his? God help them!

Long after good Mrs. Walkingden, with her warm heart and easy conscience, had gone in to settle herself beside the evening lamp with her good old husband and his newspaper—long after Mr. Crawford Molyneux's groom, waiting dismayed and in astonishment with his master's horse, had concluded either that some discreditable adventure or some unfortunate accident detained him—Crawford paced up and down, in a violent excess of emotion, which unmanned him, that dreary and silent road. He could not make up his mind to go away to the miserable waiting which remained for him; he could not reconcile himself to the frightful patience of letting things alone, and seeing what course they would take. He was here within a few steps of the supposed parents of his child, and it was in the heart of the miserable father to go to them and confess who he was, and demand her back. Why could not he do it? Why must he go on torturing himself when that plain road remained open to him?—but it was in direct contradiction to his whole life, to the steady resolution which had led him through many an emergency of trouble, and to the

determination he had formed never to acknowledge that one degrading episode of his life. Yet so hard was his anguish to bear, so bitter were his fears, so impossible did it seem to deliver himself from this appalling peril, that he paced about that suburban road—he, a ruler of the empire, an influential leader of the councils of the State, whose intentions had already passed into laws and become part of the statutes of his country. He paced backward and forward between those blank walls for more than an hour, hesitating whether he should not go and humble himself before two humdrum, quiet people, in one of these homely houses; and at last, with a pang almost as great as that which he would have felt in yielding to this humiliation, concluded it impossible, and went away to his vigil of anguish, as if in leaving the place he relinquished his last hope. That night he slept at Willesham, riding out there with some desperate hopes of fatiguing himself and being able to rest; and returned to Molyneux the next day more wretched and despairing than when he left it, yet obliged to cover his terrible anxieties and conceal them closely under the commonplace exterior of his ordinary life.

Unacquainted with any cause for unusual agitation, his wife did not suspect the fever which consumed him. *She* was quiet in her usual household ways, brightened by that hope, the first tangible hope she had ever been permitted to entertain, that, "when Edward was settled," she might seek her lost child. Nothing could be further from Amy's thoughts than any conception how much that lost child at the present moment filled her husband's mind. She did not suspect his devouring anxiety—nobody suspected it; neither sympathy nor support existed in all the world for the hard, selfish, uncommunicating man. He had to bear his trouble alone.

CHAPTER LXVI.

It was not till some time afterwards, pondering as he did over every trifle which had any bearing upon the grand subject of his thoughts, that Crawford recollected a curious peculiarity which had struck him at the moment in the few words he had heard from Mrs. Walkingden, but which his very anxiety drove from his mind directly after. She had said "them." "*They* went to Yorkshire the other day." Who were *they*? Did it mean only some companion or governess whom the doting affection of these solitary good people had given to Aprile? did it refer only to somebody sent in charge of her? who were the *they*? He asked himself whether it could be possible that his daughter was already married, and all his anguish in vain; but rejected that thought after a moment's consideration. She did not speak as of a married daughter, a child separated as children always are separated by that grand step of youthful life, from the paternal roof. It must be some one whom for Aprile's sake they kept in their house, feeling, perhaps instinctively, the difference between themselves in their old age and ordinary breeding, and the child who inherited a different blood from theirs. With this conclusion he endeavored to satisfy his own question. But it were vain to go over the perpetually recurring aggravations of thought, the new suggestions, which kept his mind in a perpetual ferment. He lived he could not tell how, doing things mechanically—mechanically answering letters, seeing strangers, going through the routine of his life, but unable to tell at the end of the day what he had done, except lived through so many additional hours, and come a little nearer to the last mortal crisis of his life.

To aggravate this dreadful condition of mind, it happened that Edward was unusually long of writing, and that no external incident occurred of importance enough to distract the mind of his unhappy father. A ministerial crisis, a doubtful vote, a lost election, might have established a saving balance

between the anxieties of public and private life; but Parliament was "up," the country was quiet, all the world was enjoying itself. There was nothing sinister or alarming in the public horizon; a plentiful harvest and a year unusually prosperous for trade, had put all the "interests" in the kingdom in good-humor. A great autumn party assembled at Bolton Abbey overflowed occasionally upon Molyneux, where this year, as it happened, there were no guests, and formed at present the only disturbing influence about the neighborhood; but they were not such visitors as interested, or even particularly sought, Crawford, a man known to be absorbed in political life. He was consequently free to indulge his anxieties, and, as day passed after day with no news from Edward, had almost made up his mind to hasten down himself, an uninvited guest, to the pretty country house in Hawarden Vale, when the dean took, like other men, his autumn holiday. It was nearly the end of the fortnight before Edward's letter at last arrived. Mr. Crawford Molyneux retired hastily from the breakfast table, when he saw his son's handwriting; other letters more important than he could acknowledge Edward's to be, formed a sufficiently ready excuse; and it was only when he had secured the library door and his own quietness that he ventured to break the seal.

The letter began with the profuse apologies of youth for neglect, which Edward hoped his dear father would not think intentional, but which he had been betrayed into by a multitude of causes, all circumstantially specified, which filled up about a page and a half of the not overlong letter. Then came a good deal about the dean and his aunt Gertrude, as was natural; all which the father glanced over with breathless agitation and a little rising courage. But, alas! only for a moment. There it stood at last, under his eyes, that dreaded name, which his forebodings told him he should certainly meet in Edward's letter. Well! God be thanked! the boy was candid and did not conceal the encounter from him. The paper grew misty and dark under his eyes as he comforted himself with that forlorn consolation. He had to make a pause to collect his faculties, and gather himself together for what was coming. What was it? how far had the misery

and the peril gone already? What further events, even while he read, might be transacting *now*?

"It happened very strangely," Edward wrote, "after the conversation which he had before I left Molyneux, that one of the first persons I met in my uncle's house was a Mr. Walkingden. I assure you, I was exceedingly struck by the coincidence, and until I ascertained particulars which quite reassured me, was extremely shy of his society, and declined his invitations at the risk of a hearty reproof from my aunt, and one of uncle Fielding's smiles, by which I perceived that both of them set me down for a coxcomb, great in my own importance and the superiority of Molyneux Hall. However, my dear father, you need be under no apprehensions; this is not *your* Mr. Walkingden; he is a jolly, retired manufacturer, with *ten* children, and a perpetual commotion in his house; hearing this, I had, of course, no further objection to avail myself of his friendly offers of hospitality, and take what sport was to be had in his grounds. He is a rich fellow, and a great favorite with the dean, who does not choose his society, as you are aware, exactly on the same principle which prevails at Molyneux. I am bound to say, however, that my excellent uncle is very successful and that I never sat—always excepting home, of course—at so pleasant a table.

"However, to return to Mr. Walkingden. He has been—I am not sure, indeed, that he is not still—the proprietor of one of the enormous factories which beautify Hawarden Vale, and has retired from active business, though not an old man, with a large fortune, and life enough in him still to enjoy himself, as he says; for a heartier old fellow in your genuine Englishman style, I never encountered. Moreover, on going to his house I found myself rewarded instantly for that great piece of condescension, by meeting and renewing my acquaintance with the two very pretty girls who travelled with me—or rather with whom I had the good luck to travel from Molyneux to Hawarden—a pair of sisters, as unlike as sisters sometimes are—one of them light, little, and sunny, the happiest creature in the world, and my special friend and confidante; the other—but I am sure even you must have observed her at the carriage window—the sweetest of gentle beauties, with a

tender melancholy and dependence about her, which to me is singularly captivating. I rather think this very sweet girl has never been quite understood or appreciated all her life, and the way in which she expands to real sympathy is quite charming. The father of these two is a brother of the Hawarden Mr. Walkingden, also a retired man, and, I presume, wealthy, who lives somewhere in the neighborhood of London; not very elevated people you will say, and I don't deny it; but, really, my dear father, when I recollect that my mother herself was, as I have heard, not quite in your own rank, admirably as she suits you, and when I see how happy my aunt Gerty is—ten times happier than my good aunt Madge, with her troublesome, uncertain husband, though he is honorable as well as reverend, I am tempted to give very little importance to conventional distinctions; however, don't be afraid, I am not falling in love, thoroughly as you have convinced me that it is my duty to do so at the first 'eligible' opportunity. I have said so much about my new acquaintances because—totally different as the circumstances of both families are from that one which you indicated to me—they still bear the same name, and I thought the best thing I could do was to tell you all about it, that you might know exactly how the matter stood.

"I enjoy everything here amazingly. I am surprised that you and the dean do not seem ever to have understood each other thoroughly, which is very odd to me. Uncle Fielding is such a famous fellow!—and lots of fun in him; so ready to enter into everything; so much heart in everything he does and says! There isn't much of the drowsy ecclesiastical life one reads of here, and as for aunt Gertrude, though I presume she must be older than she used to be, she is as splendid as ever. Ah, my dear father, this sort of thing is not like your Miss Boltons. When it is such a one as aunt Gerty, one can stand a *grande dame*.

"Love to them all, especially my mother. I'll write to her in a day or two; and believe me always your dutiful and affectionate

"EDWARD MOLYNEUX."

A father whose mind was less desperately interested might

have smiled at the "dutiful" conclusion of Edward's letter—this father was past smiling. He remained still in a frightful pause, till the words which he had read with so intense an interest should quite penetrate his understanding, which they had not yet done, though their sense had communicated itself by some mysterious process, not of intelligence, to his heart. Two—two! how could there be two? He had left but one infant behind him in that fatal German town; and could it be, that *two* started up to appal him in this frightful crisis of the family fortunes? He was so moved out of all ordinary reason by his extreme anguish, and by the certainty of Edward's letter, that this unexplainable circumstance struck him for the first moment rather as an extraordinary, supernatural aggravation of his own punishment, than as a mere fact of nature in which there still lay an opening of deliverance from the evil he dreaded. By-and-by, however, his reason came back to him; he recovered the balance of his dizzy faculties and feverish mind. Two? and only one could be April; two? and they were childless, the people who had adopted his deserted child. Could it be, after all, that he was wrong, and that this was not, could not, be the same? He went with an unsteady step to his writing-table, and took out once more that faded German paper—there it stood, beyond dispute the "Monsieur Samuel Walkingden de Kensington," and there was no other Samuel Walkingden in all the vast list of London names. He shut up the paper again, and returned to his seat blankly to ponder over Edward's letter once more, with a dull perplexity growing over his thoughts.

Good Heaven! that face he had looked at a second time at the window of the railway carriage—that pensive, pretty face in which, he said to himself, there were no associations to alarm him—could *that* be the face of his own child? but somehow the very recollection of those gentle features relieved him. Amy's baby could never have grown into such a woman; there was nothing in that face akin to his own, akin to his wife's—nothing that recalled any face he had ever seen. Was *that* tremulous thread, a hope strong enough to trust to? Heaven knows! but for the moment at least it soothed him

and made it possible to turn with unsteady hands and an agitated mind, putting aside for the moment that most momentous of questions, to the other matters which he was compelled to attend to. The letters on the table before him which he had deferred to Edward's were letters of a hundred times greater importance to all the world except himself, than a boy's dawn of inclination towards a pretty girl. But he took them up slowly and with an effort; he had given his life and his best years to these cold details of public business, and strengthened himself in the reputation and rank they brought him; but how hard and irksome and unattractive grew that yoke, when God at last struck upon his heart.

However, there was enough in these letters to rouse him even at such a moment. Public information had been received of such importance that a meeting of the cabinet had been convened, and it was probable that the duties of his own post would require his presence in town for some weeks. This necessity, from which there was no escape, conveyed at least one gleam of comfort; he could summon Edward home, to fill his vacant place at Molyneux, and so detach him from the likelihood of further acquaintance with the Hawarden family, and its connections. He took comfort in the thought, as he bestirred himself slowly to his needful business, to prepare for his immediate departure; but still, whatever he did, or wherever he moved, thought perpetually upon that girl's face. Good Heaven! how could he tell! Children were not always like their parents; features which had no hereditary descent or likeness were born in the oldest and purest races. Could that be Aprile's face? and who was the other—the second—the sister, if this was *his* child?

CHAPTER LXVII.

AFTER a consultation with himself, long, anxious, and most grave, Crawford decided that, instead of any violent sudden measures, such as going himself to Hawarden, a step which indeed was rendered impossible by the call of his duty, the wisest course he could take, was simply to summon Edward home, taking as little notice as possible of his new friends. For this there was reason enough in his own compulsory absence, and the solitude of his wife, and he could not suppose that his "dutiful and affectionate" boy would neglect such a call. Accordingly, when he had completed all his other arrangements, he wrote and despatched, with feelings strangely at variance from the calmness and restraint of its expressions, the following letter to his son :—

"MY DEAR BOY,

"Public business compels me to return to town instantly, with a prospect of being detained there for some weeks ; a most disagreeable interruption of the first real leisure I have known for years. In these circumstances I should be glad of your return here with as little delay as possible. I do not think your mother's health in a very satisfactory state, and I am very reluctant to leave her alone. Your society will reconcile her to the loss of mine, and you can make up the arrears of your Yorkshire visit another time.

"I am glad to hear you have been spending your time so pleasantly. Your new acquaintances, it is quite likely, may be entirely unconnected with the family against which I warned you ; still, I confess to having a prejudice against the name, and I trust my son is not likely to forget that these people, though most worthy people, belong to a sphere entirely different from his own.

"In haste, and extremely desirous to hear that you have started for Molyneux, to comfort your mother, which will be the best alleviation of my own solitude,

"Affectionately yours,

"C. C. M."

Mr. Crawford Molyneux did not know that the same post which conveyed this note carried also a letter to Edward, from his mother for whose health and cheerfulness he professed such affectionate concern, playfully upbraiding her son for his long silence, telling him her plans for occupying the interval of his father's absence, and that she had not felt so strong or so light of heart for years. The consequence was, that Edward, receiving both letters together, laughed aloud, in his happy ignorance, at his father's serious wile to draw him away from such pleasant quarters, and with an easy conscience, and a little mock solemnity, wrote back, for answer, that the first moment which saw him released from certain important engagements, which he had undertaken in ignorance of his father's wishes, should see him on his way to Molyneux Hall; after which the young man went on enjoying himself to the top of his bent, and exactly as he had been doing before, passing half his time at the happy house of the Walkingdens, growing into the most brotherly intimacy with one of the pretty girls with whom he had travelled, falling over head and ears in love with the other, and flirting desperately with the kind, ugly, olive-complexioned Victorine, their French maid. Pleasant days for Edward, but sadly the reverse for his anxious father, whom they bowed in their course, as if they had been so many years—whose face grew haggard with painful lines, drawn in a deeper furrow than that of public toil—and whose hair, unscathed by time before, grew gray about his strong throbbing temples, with a touch which was not the natural touch of age.

For Crawford had no sooner sent off that reserved and brief letter than he repented of it, as he would have repented of any other step taken at that critical moment, when every hour might be the turning-point, and every action was of the most solemn importance. On his way up to town, this and this only occupied the statesman's thoughts; that the matter was far too fatally serious for implied disapproval; that his own fatherly authority ought to have been exercised boldly; that he ought to have commanded, instead of asking for, Edward's return. Still, little as he had tried it, except with Edward, Crawford had learned to know that the government of

love is strong; and that its wishes are sometimes more potent than commands. The chances were greatly in favor of his son's immediate obedience; and till he knew that Edward was slow to obey, it was folly to vex himself, he said, about possibilities.

Then he read over again his son's letter, and compared the description of this mysterious girl with the face he had seen at the carriage window. That face was not one which he could have ever supposed to belong to *his* child; and it had never once occurred to him to think of April as sad, or misunderstood, or unappreciated; yet if there were two—if another stranger had been adopted—or the child, a relative perhaps, bequeathed to the fantastic couple—or, least likely of all, a child of their own born to them—what more probable than that the unfortunate, deserted infant, at first a pleasure, might turn to be only a burden, a dependent, of tastes uncongenial and native instincts differing from their own? The face was not the face of his fancy, but the position was undeniably and sadly like what it might be. Heaven deliver and save them! And this was the girl who prompted Edward to reflections about his mother's humble birth, and the inferior family of Gertrude's dean!

The father read and thought, and re-read and pondered, with a face which could express no more the great anguish of his thoughts. This horrible peril was in active operation far away in the wilds of Yorkshire; and here was he, the only man who could prevent it, rushing at fiery speed to London, to be absorbed instantly, every thought and every moment, in that cold cheat called public business! The thought was miserable, intolerable; but what could he do?—he could not transfer to any one the dreadful errand which he only could fulfil; he could not pour into the ear of any man or woman in the world the miserable disclosure of his own past guilt, or present horror of fear. Once in the course of that journey he made a half-heathen appeal of agony to the One invisible, inexorable, who held in His unseen hands the fate of these children and his own punishment. A strange, miserable, unchristian cry of nature; but still a prayer—an appeal to One beyond himself who *could* if He *would*, as the old lepers said; but this unhappy Christian gentleman, worse than the

lepers, when he had made his involuntary cry, felt strangely ashamed of it, as if it were a weak superstitious comfort, that idea of the interference of God. Why should God interfere in the concerns of a man who was a Secretary of State, and almost as powerful as an emperor? but yet nature, agonized at a possible misery which was beyond her power of hindering, wrung from his pale lips that half-reluctant voice.

And so he hastened to plunge into the labors which, for the first time, he found so irksome; to consider what was best for the country, while his heart fainted with considerations of what would save his son. In the little leisure he had he returned to that quiet road in Kensington, where, if everything else failed him, he could still, at least, summon to his aid the supposed father and mother of Aprile: but even that consolation was impossible, for the house was shut up, and the family from home. And now there was nothing for it but to wait, to see whether his paternal claims still existed in full authority—if Edward obeyed him; perhaps the boy had already done so—perhaps he was safe at Molyneux tending his mother. All the possible comfort of which his position was capable lay in that perhaps; this was what things had come to with Mr. Crawford Molyneux.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

EDWARD'S answer to his father's letter was not despatched for some days after he received that grave and reserved mis-sive, and then with a boyish, half-laughing wile to detain it a little longer, was sent to Molyneux, from which another day's delay ensued in forwarding it. This interval was one of great misery to Crawford. He got through it by dint of the public business, which was a relief even while it was an almost intolerable burden. Without that, his sufferings must have been beyond his capacity of endurance, and have come to a more rapid termination. As it was, he was compelled to interest

himself in other matters—matters any one would have said of incalculably superior importance to the love affairs of a youth of one-and-twenty. He would have said so himself contemptuously enough, had the case been that of any other man, but he had begun to learn by very painful demonstration that each one knows his own burden best. Still his thoughts *were* thrust back into the channel of public affairs most familiar to him, he *was* compelled to give his attention to wider concerns, and though his private misery remained the same, he had no longer leisure to indulge it.

Then came Edward's letter. At the first glance it was a bitter disappointment, for he had begun to hope with some confidence, as he had less and less leisure to brood over the subject, that his son was already at Molyneux; but when he had read it a second and a third time, his excitement subsided. It conveyed a promise, and Edward had never broken his word. In a day or two; it was already a day or two since the date of the letter; and perhaps by this time the promise was fulfilled. The tone of the letter, too, was easy, unembarrassed, and affectionate; a young man building himself up in opposition to his father, or disposed to neglect with cruel levity that father's dearest wishes, could never have written in such a strain, and on the whole, though sick at heart with a deferred and uncertain hope, and condemned anew to another painful interval of waiting; there was still some shade of comfort to be gleaned from Edward's letter. Crawford wrote a hurried note to his wife, desiring her to inform him instantly, and indeed by an express messenger (though he strictly enjoined upon her to keep that circumstance private from the young man), of Edward's arrival at Molyneux, and went back again with the sigh of an oppressed and laboring soul, to his weighty business; finding out then for the first time how hard it is to labor, how difficult to keep the mind and thoughts upon matters indifferent or general, however great their importance, when private griefs or anxieties tug at a man's individual heart. Perhaps hereafter that experience might make of him a gentler ruler, a more lenient master; it had no such effect now. Obligated to restrain his feelings in one particular, he relaxed his usual restraint in others with a

melancholy self-indulgence. He was irritable beyond all precedent, impatient, overbearing, almost cruel, not because he wanted to hurt anybody, Heaven help him! only because his punishment was hard, and his sufferings more than he could bear.

When Amy received that strange note, with its particular and detailed directions, a great fright took possession of her. She could not guess, she could not divine, what possible cause her husband had for his anxiety about Edward, and all kinds of terrors came into her mind;—all kinds of terrors, except that one particular dread which never crossed her for an instant, and which, natural and simple woman as she was, she would have repelled and cast off indignantly without entertaining it for a moment. Perhaps there were some things in nature, after all, which her simplicity understood better than Crawford's wisdom; and she trusted God with a profound and devout trust as far above his heathen consciousness of God's existence as heaven is above earth. But she *was* struck with great and sudden fear; she supposed the father must have heard something of harm or trouble possible to the son. She thought, in her ignorance of any other impending trouble, of epidemic or pestilence at Hawarden, which her husband might have heard of, and that, knowing the dauntless temper and strict ideas of duty which were common to Everard Fielding and his wife, Crawford was afraid lest his son should be tempted to linger in the infected neighborhood. Then a little matter of her own troubled her with a certain sense of guilt. Edward, in one of the letters which he had written to her since his father's absence, had made slight but uneasy mention of being required to do something "in the dark," as he said, without knowing the reason, and Amy, who seldom lectured anybody, had been seized by a sudden didactic fit, occasioned by words which brought her own mournful example so clearly before her. She had answered his letter immediately, strenuously exhorting him to do nothing which did not approve itself to his own conscience.

"My dearest boy," she had said in her letter, "I know what I am saying. Once, when I was younger than you, I yielded to a judgment I thought better than my own; God

forgive me, I have never got over it all my life. Edward, do nothing, I beseech you, on anybody else's words, if *you* think it is not right."

In Edward's next happy, light-hearted letter he had laughed at her solemnity, as sons may laugh at mothers, but she recurred to the incident now with a pang of self-accusation. Could it be that, while his father urged him "for his good," his unhappy mistaken mother, always selfishly guided by her own experience, had justified him in following an imaginary duty, or in the mere youthful waywardness and pride which loved to brave danger? Amy's heart was heavy under the thought. She durst not, under pain of her husband's heavy displeasure, disclose to Edward the extraordinary proof of his father's anxiety for his return which his instructions showed; but she did relieve her own burden of sudden uneasiness by an immediate earnest entreaty to her son to hasten his return. "Your father is very, very anxious to know that you are safe at home," she permitted herself to say, and in her newly awakened solicitude sent an anxious list of questions to her sister Gertrude chiefly concerning the sanitary condition of Hawarden and the precious health of her boy; for the simple soul had never quite emancipated herself from her nursery. She was nothing but a mother, taking words in their matter-of-fact meanings, and trembling for palpable dangers. Moral evils, so far as regarded her children, had never yet appalled her. She could think of nothing else but dreadful perils of disease and pestilence, which Edward, a mistaken boy, perhaps abetted by the unconscious folly of her own advice, would not come away from. Poor Amy! with that aggravation of self-blame, she was half as wretched as her husband. Where there is little confidence in a family, such by-play and cross-purposes are almost inevitable, and it was with a nearly equal amount of anxiety that both father and mother now awaited the return and trembled for the future of their boy.

But Edward did not come back. In spite of all his good intentions, his unshaken allegiance to his father, his undiminished affection for his home, his hearty, youthful inclination to content everybody, and do his duty, the youth, like many another youth, had forgotten himself in these first flowery

paths of his sunshiny life. He did not write even, because that would be only to make excuses and to throw a certain wilful and systematic look on his disobedience, whereas he never meant to be disobedient. Every night he fell asleep with compunctions, resolved to go home to-morrow, "One more day, just one; I cannot leave them without saying farewell." But the farewell was never said, and the happiness of the day not only made up for, but conquered triumphantly, the compunctions of the night.

He did not mean any harm, poor fellow! he yielded to the most natural and unavoidable of temptations. He was doing nothing *wrong*, he sometimes said to himself; and his father would have thought it a most venial offence, to be forgiven with smiles of congratulation and gratified pride, had the cause been Sophia Bolton instead of Helen Walkingden. Sweet Helen! with her pretty pensive ways, her droop of sadness, her strange doubt and fancy that nobody loved her—that nobody loved her! as if any one could look unmoved, the chivalrous Edward thought to himself, into those wistful, tender eyes, so strangely, wonderfully different, in their sweet youthful gravity and thought, from the happy but far less fascinating sunshine of sister May.

So *he* was spending his days, lost in his first romance, the joyous young hero, while his father suffered tortures of which he could form no conception, and lingered out the weary hours, sick to the bottom of his heart; and his mother trembled lest her boy had caught a fever, and could neither sleep nor rest for thinking of that unlikely danger—such was the innocent occasion of all this misery, and such was their present life.

CHAPTER LXIX.

It would be impossible to describe the condition of mind in which Crawford passed these days, looking and longing every hour, both day and night, for that expected messenger whom his anxiety had ordered to be sent from Molyneux, an order which harassed him a great deal more than it could have advantaged him ; since now the extremity of his expectation was not confined to the time of receiving his letters, but extended to every moment, both of labor and repose. He pushed aside his letters, state documents as many of them were, with a sick loathing, every morning, only to draw them back again with miserable patience and apply himself to his duties, making breathless gasps and pauses whenever a hurried step was audible, or a voice sounded from without. But that messenger never came, Edward did not write. Amy sent anxious inquiries from Molyneux about the epidemic of her imagination, and wanted to know if *that* was the occasion of his extreme concern about their boy.

These letters from his wife were almost the intolerable point in Crawford's sufferings. The fears of the ignorant woman, who knew nothing about *his* overpowering solicitude, for the youth's health—*his health* of all things in the world !—and her motherly details about the other members of the household, afflicted with a fierce intolerance her overburdened husband. He crushed the paper in his hand and flung it from him, then picked it up again, to conquer his impatience and try whether something more important was to be found in it than those tame maternal terrors. But Amy had nothing to say, nothing except an oft-repeated iteration that she expected Edward every day, and should attend to his father's wishes the instant her son arrived. That was all : but not a word from Edward, to say what he was doing, or why he did not come. Thus another fortnight passed ; after all, it was but one month or little more that the whole had lasted, and Edward's reluctance to obey his father had stretched over only a portion of that time ;

but the hours were days, and the days years to the anxious father. His life had become a burden to him. How he accomplished his needful labors he could not tell. Sometimes it appeared to him that his tortured brain was clearer than usual, and that the very impatience of his great suffering conveyed a desperate insight to his mind. No deliverance, no release, could ever teach him to look back with scorn upon *this* dread probation of suspense, or make light of its agonies, and he learned by the torments of his own a deeper penetration into the universal human mind and heart.

When the second week had fully passed since the receipt of Edward's letter, and no further intelligence of him had arrived, Crawford, no longer able to keep silence, wrote to his son again. It was clear that something more than a request was necessary this time, and it was in the full exercise of paternal authority, peremptory and serious, that the troubled father wrote:—

“MY DEAR EDWARD,

“I have waited with grief and surprise, but patience, to hear of your arrival at Molyneux. I am grievously disappointed alike at your disobedience and your silence. What is the cause? You are a very young man, young enough still to trust to your father's better judgment. I have gone so far as to take you into my confidence, and inform you of the solemn and important objection which exists against any intercourse between my family and that of Mr. Walkingden. Am I to understand your silence as a declaration of defiance and denial of my authority? or simply of contempt for the sentiments which I have expressed to you so fully? One or the other it must be; and I am at a loss to understand what sad and extraordinary influence can, all at once, have placed so great a gulf between my son and myself. Does my solemn warning go for nothing with you, Edward? Do you slight deliberately the caution I gave you at a cost of so much pain to myself? I am no longer young enough, if I ever had been disposed, to make unnecessary mysteries, but I repeat to you, that your intercourse with these people—on other grounds than that of their inferior condition—occasions me

the most serious suffering. Go home ; let there be no further delay or excuse. I am most deeply, seriously in earnest. Go home at once to Molyneux, and remember that every hour which elapses until you do so, is for me an hour of pain.

“C. C. M.”

This letter was despatched, and two other dreary days of silent waiting followed, with still no messenger from Molyneux, forestalling the post, to tell how Edward had arrived, repentant and in haste, at his father's house. But the third morning brought the young man's answer to that appeal. His father read it with hot eyes and a throbbing brain—a young, vehement, passionate lover's letter, calling upon him to remember that this family was not, could not, be the interdicted family ; quoting the expressions in his former letter, which acknowledged that they were not ; begging, beseeching him with wild entreaties to confirm that acknowledgment ; protesting that if, after all, these were his father's unconscious enemies, that he had been cruelly permitted to deceive himself, and that the blame of his ruin and heartbreak must be upon his father's head ; and again returning to go over all the differences with vain and eager iteration,—the *two* daughters, the parents who were not old ; and imploring, for God's sake, the favorable answer which alone could restore any pleasure to his life.

A postscript, carefully erased, baffled the tired eyes of the miserable reader ; he could only make out in it, that the writer's love for Helen Walkingden was unchangeable, and that no mere word of mystery could or should divide them. So much he deciphered with difficulty, and could not read the imprudent words which Edward had repented of—that even his father's judgment could not rule a man who had his own happiness to decide, and that nothing would make him yield his hopes blindly before an unknown obstacle. Edward added in a second postscript, tremulous and conciliatory, that he remained there, not out of any defiance, but because he felt sure his dear father had forgotten, amongst the more important things he had to think of, that this was *not* the family, and that he should still linger only till he had confirmation of

that truth, so vital to his happiness, from his father's own hand.

"Forgotten, amongst the more important things he had to think of." O Heaven! he who had known no thought but that, felt nothing else, dreamed of nothing else, for weeks! He rose up out of his misery, without so much as thinking what he was about to do, and left the room, with the untouched breakfast on the table,—nothing wonderful in that, for he had scarcely eaten for days. He went to his sleeping apartment in his confusion of anguish, and drew out the drawers, with some faint idea of preparing with his own hands for the journey he was about to take; then suddenly recollecting himself, called his servant, and told him he was about to return immediately to Molyneux. Public business had become less urgent, but it did not matter to Mr. Crawford Molyneux that his release was easier to-day than it would have been a week ago. Nothing mattered to him now, but to save his son. Then he wrote a hurried, half-legible note, to his official deputy, telling how "urgent private affairs" called him away, then ordered his carriage, and in the momentary interval resigned himself to wait with a desperate endurance, dreadful to see.

How everything delayed! Delay, delay,—there was nothing else in this world; how the slow instants coursed round their little circle in his watch, so that it was only a minute, while it seemed an hour. Then he made another desperate ejaculation of appeal (not the second or third by many) to the God whom he did not know, to Him who *could* if He *would*, and again moved in a fret of consuming fever to the window to see if they never would be ready, those useless grooms and servants whom he cursed in his heart. He cursed them, though he had prayed in the same breath; he did not mean it—he meant nothing but a madness of love and horror and anguish, in which he had lost himself. Then, after a while, he set out. If he could have walked, or killed his best horse by a gallop all the way, it might have relieved him somewhat, but it was no relief to sit in that carriage, silent, consumed by a life of pain within him. His servant came to the carriage window, the few times the train stopped, with natural

anxiety, to make sure that nothing had happened, for his face was ghastly enough to warrant any catastrophe.

There he sat, rushing through the country which he helped to rule, a voiceless, miserable man; but the extremity of his pain drove him again to that cry which the lions make in their hunger, and the wild beasts to God. God came to him, he knew not how, in his wild and savage agony. He went up to his own house, with the fiery pressure somewhat relaxed, and the blindness a little cleared from his eyes—went up with his purpose clear enough before him now. Heaven help him, to arise and go, not to his Father, but to his son, and to his children, to confess his great sin, and humble himself before all the world.

CHAPTER LXX.

MR. CRAWFORD MOLYNEUX went forward heavily and slowly into his own house. He had left it a strong man in the full possession of his strength, he returned after about three weeks' absence with a heavy step, and an enfeebled frame, his eyes half covered under his drooping eyelids and the dreamy look of old age or extreme pain in his face. When he passed up the grand staircase, on his way to find his wife, his man, who had travelled with him, stood below, talking with the butler in a corner of the hall, and listened to respectfully at a distance by some of the other servants. The valet was eloquent on the subject of his master's extraordinary illness; he ate nothing, he did not sleep, his temper was "awful;" something surely was about to happen, and he knew that "the old gen'leman, meaning master's uncle, went off very sudden in an apoplexy fit." The old butler, who could have told them all about that, was pensioned off years ago: the present servants were new, and did not even know how distant was the link of kindred between their master and his predecessor at Molyneux, and they were ready enough to leap over the particulars, as is

common with their class, and to conclude upon the fate of their employer: he was "in a bad way."

Meanwhile he went slowly upstairs and through the great, splendid, open rooms, all open to the sweet air and blooming gardens, which on this side of the house lay in shade, looking for his wife, and at last, with a recollection of her usual morning room, turned, impatient but yet slow, through the long passage. That she should be *there* of all places in the world!—there in that room where death had been, and where the last sudden stroke which solves all secrets had fallen upon uncle Molyneux! With his strange new intuitions of humility, and total breakdown of strength and pride, united to all his old imperious impatience and uncontrolled temper, he was angry and annoyed, even while he sought her: to go *there*!

Amy heard the step sounding, hurried and yet slow, along the gallery, and rose to open the door, with a presentiment of evil which she could not have explained. She had not the remotest expectation of seeing her husband, and when he waved his hand, calling her imperiously to "Come away, he wanted her instantly," she was frightened by her own pangs of motherly dread and foreboding. Something *must* have happened to Edward! Her limbs trembled so much that she could scarcely follow him. He went into a little ante-chamber, the first of the great drawing-room suite, to wait for her. There she found him pacing up and down the room.

"What is the matter, Charles? Oh, tell me; I can bear it!" she cried, hastening up to him, as well as her trembling limbs would allow her.

He came to meet her, not with any thought of giving *her* comfort; he put his hand on her shoulder, and leaned upon her little, light figure; leaned heavily, as though any support was of importance to him. It was she who must be the consoler now.

"Amy, you must come with me," he said, hoarsely. "We have no time to lose; not a moment. I am going to seek our child."

"Our child?"

"Ay, Aprile; your baby: too late! O God! too late! But it must be done. Come! God knows what they are

doing, what they are saying, this very moment! Come, Amy! Ah, I forget," he said, releasing her, with a long sigh of melancholy patience, "we must wait till it is time for the train. Everything has to be waited for in this world—everything—everything!—except punishment and pain."

Then he sat down heavily in the nearest chair. Amy, believing, like the servants, that some mortal sickness was upon him, or that his mind had gone astray, came to his side, almost to his feet, with all the suddenly awakened love and tenderness to which a strong man's suffering moves such women. What was it?—had his mind been too much for the feebler mortal machinery? Was it a "stroke" of sudden unaccountable visitation? She took his hands, which were cold, and chafed them tenderly in her own; even kissed them, pleading with a pitiful face.

"You are ill; tell me what it is, dear Charles."

He put her away from him suddenly, and smiled, at the thoughts he could read in her face. He was ill, or crazed, she supposed! Would to heaven that were all! He smiled with a sad, pathetic bitterness at that happy ignorance; then, moved with the need he had of her—that need felt some time or other in the course of every long life, which at once consoles and avenges women—stretched out his hand to her again.

"Come here, Amy; don't go away from me again; I am not ill," he said, in a tone which would have been like his natural tone, but for an extraordinary melting and softness; "neither ill nor—losing my wits, as you suppose. Ah, God knows that were a small matter! What I have said to you is quite true; I am going—would to God we had gone sooner!—not alone; you must go with me, Amy; to take back our child!"

She was so much afraid of his changed tone and unusual looks, that she dared not give way to the ecstasy of terror and joy which came over her. She only took his hand again, anxious and watchful of his looks, and said under her breath, "Thank God! thank God!"

"Hush!" he said, sternly, and with an imperative impatient gesture; "or you will drive me mad! You don't know

what you are saying, unhappy woman. Make haste; I have left orders that a carriage should be ready for us in time. There is still an hour—an hour—a year! it does not matter what one calls it. Make haste; get your bonnet and—and what things you have that can comfort you, you poor mother. We shall only reach them late to-night.”

“Reach *them*, Charles: who is it? where is it? Oh, if you would only tell me!” cried his wife.

He rose impatiently and rushed away to the other end of the room, going on with his own thoughts. “So late, that another night is lost,” he said, with an angry, fiery movement of his hand through the air, rapidly rising again into the feverish paroxysm of his excitement, “and we shall have to go to Gerty’s house, and meet them with calm faces as if everything was as it has always been. Ah! so it is, to be sure—as it has always been! Once I supposed Gerty would find me out and betray me—or that poor faithful creature—good heaven! without thinking that God was yonder and meant to do it one day, after His own inexorable fashion. Come, Amy! time passes quicker than we think for after all; make haste! make haste! however quick we travel it will still be late, late, too late, ere we get there.”

“To Hawarden?” faltered Amy; “where Edward is; Charles! Ah! then it *is* Edward; something has happened to Edward! I am able to bear it if you will only tell me. Oh, my boy! my boy!”

“Yes, it is Edward!” said Crawford. “It is Edward—it is Hawarden. God help us! and it is that baby too. Amy! Amy! Heaven forgive you! Why did you not go back and bring her under your shawl?”

Amy stood in the middle of the room, sick with a torture of anxiety, wringing her hands, sobbing at that strange recurrence of reproach, which yet was not like reproach. Was he mad? what did he mean? while he went wandering about to lull himself with motion, meaning nothing less than to be cruel to her, or keep her in unnecessary suspense; but glad to deaden and clog with words those toothed and sworded wheels of thought which were clashing constantly in his own heart.

“Are they both at Hawarden?” she said, at last, under her

breath. "Edward and—and my child? are they both there, are they together? Do they know? Tell me, or I shall die!"

At that cry of pain almost equal to his own, he went up to her in his turn and took her hand, with a novel and extraordinary compassion. "Poor soul!" he said, with a sudden rush of moisture to his dry eyes; "a faithful woman! *you* never harmed or upbraided me, poor Amy! I would to heaven you *could* die before you knew it. Together! ay, God help them! And that boy, our boy; what do you think he asks of me in my misery? that I would give him leave to marry Aprile, your child! O my God! that is what it has come to! If I can but live to get there!"

Amy grasped his hand in spite of the sudden movement which he made in the caprice of his anguish to thrust her again away from him. She stood holding him, the feeble, shy little woman—supporting him with an arm which he could have crushed at a grasp; clinging to him as if the warmest love had been between them; growing larger, stronger, fuller, as she stood by the strong man who had yielded to his fate; kissing him as she never had done before, with tears and smiles, and an ineffable tenderness and faith in her face.

"No, Charles," she cried—"no, no, no!" each word coming like a sob; "it is only some frightful mistake! No; God bless them! If they are together, they are brother and sister; Charles, listen to me! you are wise and strong, and know everything else better than I do; but you do not know God!"

"No," he said with a pang, sitting down again heavily, in the dull alternations of his despair. "No; except that he destroys and curses, and does not spare nor care—why should He care? Have I minded Him that He should refrain his hand from me?"

Amy fell down upon her knees before him, pressing in the subdued beauty of her motherly age, in her eager tenderness of succor and comfort, close to the cold bosom which had borne so little love for her, and kissed his hands and looked into his face with a tremulous, joyful, pathetic smile, which would not be discouraged.

"We shall find them, and all will be well," she said softly in his ear, with a voice lower than a whisper. "We shall find

them and rejoice. God did not leave my darling, when we did, Charles! Let us go and bring the children home!"

A strong shiver ran through the strong man's frame; he trembled at the words with a pang of horror and fear which she did not comprehend; but he *was* comforted. Her trust, so different from his own overpowering dread, stemmed the tide of it, and arrested him against his will. He made a pause and took breath, sheltering his shattered mind for a moment in the certainty of her confidence. What if she were right? what if the simple creature knew better than he what loves and hearts were made of? It was but a desperate peradventure; yet it was possible, for *she* believed in it; and in the strength of that, he rose and stood upright, and permitted her to minister to him. They forgot they were great people in that overpowering moment. She went away with the haste of a girl, and brought him wine and a morsel of bread, which he took from her hands. Then she hastened away to make ready for her journey, and kiss the little daughter who was no longer Aprile; went, not running, but with a noiseless, breathless haste, her heart leaping in her throat. The day had come she had lived and waited for for years. Whosoever trembled, she thanked God. Her vigil was over, her penitence accepted, her child safe. He who had done these things lived and guarded the children still. What should their mother fear?

CHAPTER LXXI.

AMY was gone but one unnecessary moment from her husband's side; that moment she spent in a little room, a humble sleeping apartment, where lay an old woman in the content and quiet of painless incapacity. Amy bent her head over old Sarah's pillow, and "gave way," as Sarah would have bidden her lady, to a momentary passion of tears which eased her heart.

"Sarah, pray for us," she cried, in the old woman's ear. "Our child, which was dead, is alive again—my beautiful baby, my first Aprile! Pray for us, Sarah; pray for us, night and day, till we come home!"

"Lord bless us," cried the poor old woman, looking round with a cry of wonder when that voice had ceased, and that vision disappeared from her bedside. "Is it my head that's a-going, or *my* lady's? Pray!—the likes of me that never was real good nor religious till I took to my bed, and was no more use in this world. Ay, bless her dear heart, what should I do but pray; but the Lord have pity upon us! what would become o' me, and this house, and them childer, if *her* wits was gone?"

Then Amy hastened to her husband; he drew her arm through his, and led her out of the house, grave in his gray paleness, with a step still slow, but nervously firm—a different man. If he hoped no more and feared no less, his mind, notwithstanding, was stayed, he could not tell how. Perhaps there was pity in God for these young creatures, young, innocent of harm, in their great misfortune. *He* was going to arrest their progress in that guilty, miserable dream, of which they did not know the guiltiness;—and, perhaps that God, who *could* if He *would*, might come in after to do His part, and wipe the dreadful impression from their deceived and unpolluted souls. So he began to hope, with a forlorn acquiescence in the will which he could not resist—so he tried to believe for Amy's sake.

The journey looked slow, slow to their agitated, anxious minds, as, perhaps, a journey by railway, though the most rapid of conveyances, always does to people in distress; the perfect quiescence, the impossibility of urging horses, or threatening postilions, the inevitable, immoveable character of that hard scientific speed, conveying a perpetual irritation to minds which would find some relief in a progress which they could help by exertions of their own. It was late when they arrived at Hawarden, a bustling manufacturing town full of noise and lights, with big gleaming illuminating factories, still showing like castles on the bank of its river, and the voice of labor loud and energetic still, for trade was prosperous, and many of the

mills were working overhours. Here they had to hire a carriage to drive out to the dean's country house, which was close by his old rectory—a dismal dark drive of an hour in the chill of the September night. Crawford, whom long sufferings, long fasting, and want of sleep, had made sensitive, and whose chill of misery offered no resistance to the more innocent sharpness of the night air, shivered and trembled as he sat silent in his corner, with a nervous misery, half of the mind and half of the body, and drew up the rattling glasses of the hackney carriage, as they jarred along the dark country road. His wife and he did not say a word to each other as they approached the end of their journey: to him, the scene of a coming anguish not to be looked forward to, bitterer than death, in which the horrible blight and incipient strain to be cast upon the minds of his children—his *children!*—not his *son* alone—began to gloom greater and more overpowering than any grief of his own; to her, only the end of her long hopes, the place which held Aprile, the one blessed spot of earth where the long wrong was to be righted, and comfort and peace brought to all hearts;—but they did not speak, could not speak, as they drew near that scene of fate. Once she put her hand into his in the darkness, a silent expression of sympathy and compassion. He grasped it for an instant and then put it away. He was past sympathy, past words, past thought. A few moments more and Edward's voice would sound in his father's stupefied ears, and Edward's face, which had always made his heart glad, shine in his eyes—in his eyes who came to darken the very daylight for Edward, and destroy the sanctity of his youth. God help him! his strength *must* stand, his life *must* last till he told that story of his guilt and saved his boy. *Then* it would be merciful, he thought, to make him die.

But when the lights and voices of the house, and the astonished face of its master, coming out to welcome them and calling Gertrude, roused them out of their anxious silence, Edward's voice was not among the others, nor Edward's step forward to meet his parents. The husband and wife stepped out dazzled and speechless, into the midst of all these lights and greetings. Amy grasped the hand of Gertrude, who

came sweeping out to meet her, in all her old magnificence and energy, and whispered, "Where is Edward? His father has come to see Edward," with a tremulous, eager voice.

Crawford himself could not speak; he shook his brother-in-law's hand, looking beyond him, behind him, and passed over every other person with his searching gaze for one who was not here. Where was his boy? They were hurried in to the bright room where the dean's family had been spending their evening; when, partly eased by a momentary interval before his interview with his son, and partly stimulated by his old enmity to Fielding, never quite obliterated, Crawford recovered himself. His wife had unconsciously taken his hand to lead, as she had instinctively spoken for, him,—the first time in her life that she had been either his spokeswoman or guide. He was not displeased, but it was unnecessary; he drew her arm within his, and led her in with a certain state and formality. It was easy now for him to guess where Edward was—where his love was, the unhappy boy!—who never after this evening should think but with horror and dismay of that love again.

"How very strange you should come to-day," cried Gertrude, "when of all possible days Edward had chosen this one to leave us! If you have come straight from London, Charley, you must have crossed him. He has gone—I can't exactly say *to* you; but, of course, you would have seen him the moment he arrived in town."

"Gone! where?" said Crawford.

While Amy, unable to sit calmly by to hear the difficulty with which her husband spoke, and see the ashy color of his face—Amy in whom his prostration and anguish had suddenly awakened all the love which had lain dormant for years, got up hastily to hover behind his chair, and unnoticed to hang about and watch him, ready to answer his slightest call. Fielding and Gertrude, to the exclusion of the other members of the party, came close to him where he sat, for he continued to sit where he had sat down on the first moment of entering, afraid to betray himself and his dignity by showing the trembling which pervaded his strong frame.

"Don't be angry with Edward, Charles," said Gerty; "I am afraid he has perhaps been what you will call foolish. We did not know of it till yesterday; and I do hope—he is so young and so innocent and good—I hope, dear Charley, you will forgive him. Two very sweet girls have been here, one of them quite like what Amy used to be, Everard says;—ah, I see you have heard about them;—and Edward, we are afraid, has allowed himself to grow attached to Helen. Do have patience! you don't know what a nice girl she is! The father and mother came down a few days since; they were clearer-sighted than we were, and guessing a difference of rank, I suppose, which might make difficulties, hurried the girls away. They went yesterday, Charley; and Edward—I am very sorry to confess it, but I suppose it is natural enough—Edward, poor fellow, would not be convinced that he ought to be very glad of it, but insisted on going after them to-day."

"Going after them? He has gone to town, then?" said Crawford, coldly; then he made a pause, then repeated, in a tone of extraordinary restrained pathetic force, despair, and satisfaction together, "and one of them quite like what Amy used to be, Everard says."

He looked round at his wife as he uttered the words; did that convince her, that dreadful proof of his terrors? For the moment he was beyond thinking what anybody thought.

"Oh, no, no, Charles; no!" cried poor Amy, clasping her hands. For her, as for him, the second sister counted nothing; *she* thought but of her child, and he of the Aprile, the Helen whom Edward loved.

A pause of wonder and silence followed, nobody knowing what to say after that extraordinary digression, and the unexplainable communication of something which they both understood, but which was totally mysterious to everybody else, which passed between the newly arrived pair. Their looks, their extreme agitation, their singular unexampled clinging to each other, confused and amazed the bystanders. No one felt able to speak. No one had ever seen such common mutual emotion, such union, between Charles Crawford and his wife before.

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"Fielding, we are very anxious about Edward; there's more to be anxious about than I can tell you," said Crawford at last, after a pause; "more than difference of rank, Heaven knows! We must follow instantly, we cannot rest. Is there a night-train to town?"

"There is one at eleven o'clock," said the dean. "Don't think of that; it will wear you out; you are tired and agitated already. Stay here quietly all night, there's a good fellow; never mind explaining why you are anxious. Give me a message to Edward, and I'll start instantly and bring him down."

"Ah, Charles! but the child?" cried Amy, starting with a sudden pang. It seemed to her as though the hope of recovering Aprile was gliding away from her again.

The child! Fielding and his wife once more looked at each other: the whole conduct of these two was inexplicable. But Crawford was holding out his hand to the astonished dean.

"Thank you," he said, "Everard; I would not have done so much for you, nor with so good a heart. Thank you; but it is easier to travel than to wait. Let us have your carriage, will you?" he said, a moment after, with a strange mixture of nervous irritability in his profound suffering. "Those rattling glasses worried me—ridiculous!—but I suppose we are always ridiculous, even in our sadness, and, Gerty, give my poor Amy another shawl."

Thus they went back again, leaving the dean's household in the gravest bewilderment, drove silently along the same road, got into another railway carriage, and pursued their dismal midnight way to London.

"Do you know where we are going, Charles?" Amy had asked in her trembling voice, and he had answered, "Yes."

That was almost the whole that passed between them on their journey. The poor wife put his cloak round him, persuaded him to repose his head in the corner of the carriage, and sat watching all night with wistful tenderness. They had not been loving in their lives, Heaven knows! little affection to all appearance had existed between them; but the bond of years told in the time of extremity, that sacra-

mental trust of marriage, which the coldest people feel somehow in their hard hours, who have lived together for a lifetime. He had need of *her* when his heart was overwhelmed; and when he was worsted and overcome in that terrible battle she found her love for *him*.

CHAPTER LXXII.

A SEPTEMBER morning, bright and full of sunshine, warm yet cooled with the approaching "fall" of the year; London trees scorched brown, shedding their parched leaves about the streets; the common stream of life afloat as gay and full as ever through the common ways, but only half a dozen morning loungers now in the once-crowded parks of fashion; and stately lines of houses standing shut up and deserted;—these things Amy saw as, after a few hours' rest—rest so called, meaning a painful dreary pause until it should be possible to proceed to the house of the Walkingdens—she drove through these closed streets towards Kensington with her husband. *He* saw nothing; but, leaning back with that face, so gray and blanched in the morning light, ashy with sudden age, contracted with sufferings too fierce and long continued for any strength to bear, shut out the sunshine with his hand, and went on, dumb and motionless, this time with an unpostponable miserable certainty in all his sensations, to let his children know their fate.

Nothing like fate hung about the quiet precincts of that house at Kensington. Fate was unknown at Myrtle Villa. There they were, all in the garden this sunshiny morning, excited with something new which had happened in the family, a surprise, joyful but startling, with some mists of doubt in it, and previsions of family change and vicissitudes unlooked for rousing their happy life. No, not fate; it was Providence which sent the dews and the sunshine into that sweet enclosure; it was God who loved them, who blessed and

watched that homely house. Shut in by the little gate with the railing, by the blank garden walls which made so poor a show without, the father and mother were walking up and down together on the sunny gravel path, he with his newspaper held in both hands behind him, she with some knitting in hers, casting doubtful, loving, proud looks both of them towards the shadier end of the garden, where another couple, scarcely visible among the trees, were wandering in a dream. They were not thinking of a great match, these honest, affectionate people; they were thinking of the eager young lover in his triumph, and of their pretty daughter's shy, half frightened happiness. Their pretty daughter! the fanciful child who had perplexed and delighted them all her life, the pensive Helen, who had tried to be neglected, and was ashamed now to confess that she was happy. They smiled at it, with tears in their eyes; that sweet youthful folly! she who had never known the shadow of harm or wrong near her all her innocent joyous life.

Who was the other, nearer to them, gliding about among the flowers—the other daughter, whom Helen sometimes tried to believe the best beloved? She was not the heroine of the day, as it happened; but had no more thought that *she* was neglected because the glances of the father and mother followed her companion, than that it was an unkindly fortune which bestowed the lover on Helen and not on herself. She was busy about the flowers, happy with her share of the family happiness, singing to herself in the lightness of her heart. At the present moment she was standing on the pretty grassplot, shielded by a trelliswork of creeping plants from the door, and only to be seen, when the entering strangers were fairly within the pretty enclosure, the door shut behind them, and themselves approaching to the house. Thus *they* spent the sunny morning, this innocent, tender-hearted household, fearing nobody who could harm them, and without a shadow in their firmament that could indicate the approach of a tragic announcement, or an unhappy fate.

It was at this moment that the carriage of Mr. Crawford Molyneux stopped at the door. Mr. Walkingden's man of all work admitted the strangers, who asked for his master, with

a little awe; so grand an equipage as the privy councillor's town carriage seldom drew up at Myrtle Villa or was visible in Ilex Road. They entered together, these two anxious visitors. At this moment Crawford's agitation had almost totally overpowered him; the very hour, the moment, was come; he was almost in the presence of his unknown child; and a deadly terror of seeing the two together, of finding Edward in the height of his miserable delusion at Aprile's side, struck him with intolerable faintness. He drew back behind his wife with the cowardice of great anguish. It was the climax of his fate, and he shrank from it,—his courage failed him,—he put his hand over his eyes, to shield him from the sight he dreaded,—feeling at that moment as though his measure was full, and he could bear no more.

But Amy did not shrink; she went a step before him, with her mother's courage, sweet tears in her eyes, her heart beating; fear, suspense, trouble, everything, lost in the thought that she was about to reclaim her child. She glided on before him, drawing him forward with her, holding his hand on her arm. A few steps more and Amy suddenly stopped with a low cry. With a contracting pang at his heart, like death, Crawford opened his heavy eyes. Oh! God of mercy, who was it? what was it? Not Edward with his dreadful love, not the pensive face he had seen at the carriage window, not a stranger, another man's child. There she stood, with the sunshine about her in her sweet, young, cheerful beauty, fearing nobody, doubting nobody, looking up with those frank, sweet eyes, blue eyes as blue as heaven. The man before her, whom she did not know, seized his wife's arm with a gripe of iron, and cried out, "Who was it? who was it?" with a cry more bitter than anything these young ears had ever heard. Who was it? It was Amy as she had been in the Woodcote garden. It was Amy as she had watched over the cradle of his child. After he had spoken he stood confounded, watching, his heart breaking within him—breaking, though it was with a wild tumult of sudden nature, and hope, and love; what need was there to ask her name or to trace her life? There she stood, gazing at her mother with her mother's eyes, and he beside them who had severed them, with the in-chains

breaking in a novel agony, which was not pain, from his bewildered heart.

Neither of them saw that good Mrs. Walkingden approached, wondering, amazed who the strangers could be, who, with exclamations so strange, stood lost to all ordinary courtesies before her child. Amy stood still looking at her lost one, with the tears dropping over her cheeks; but she thought of her husband even at that moment with a woman's wistful pity for his cruel self-delusion. She put his hand loose from her arm and went forward to that other Amy who gazed at her, and had it in her heart to cry too, and stood silent in a strange confusion. Amy went straight to her, clasping in a kind of transport the soft hand of this woman whom she had never seen before, but whom she knew to be her own.

"My child!" said the mother, trembling as she touched her, and asking the question with an extraordinary emotion, which these words conveyed as well as any other; and which no words could convey. "My child, is Edward here?"

"Edward—Mr. Molyneux?" said the half-frightened girl. "He is with Helen, yonder, with my sister. Shall I call him; have you come for him only? I will tell him you are here."

"With Helen!" cried Crawford, in his hoarse, half-articulate voice; "and, for God's sake, child, who are you?"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Amy, with her tears flowing; "hush!" she said, kissing the girl's hand with lips that quivered. "Hush! she is Aprile! Do you think I did not know? God bless them; they are brother and sister. Charles, Charles, it is all over; do not die! O God, do not let him die!"

But he had fallen heavily, too heavily for her feeble strength to bear him up, with his head almost touching the feet of his deserted child. Such commotion as followed may be easily imagined. Edward, rushing from the shade where he talked with his newly betrothed, came with the amazement of a man in a dream to his father's assistance; every servant in the house came flying out to embarrass the scene. The servants of Mr. Crawford Molyneux, bursting in from the door, were sent off instantly by Edward for doctors. Nobody knew anything but that he was Edward's father, and ill, very ill.

Nobody asked anything but about his sudden seizure; the whole phantasmagoria of that past half-hour, the anguish, the joy, the rapture of discovery, had vanished for the moment; here was nothing but a man, alive yet unconscious, breathing with a heavy respiration that rang through every other sound, the centre of a little crowd of anxious watchers. The love and the guilt, the horror and the consolation, had all disappeared beneath that mortal stroke. The worm had gnawed at the roots of the tree, till the first spring gale overthrew it. Of all the thoughts which had moved him, and all the powers that had warred in his mind, nothing was left but the two grand antagonists of nature fighting out their battle,—the life and the death.

"But he will not die," said his wife, as she rose from her knees, where she had been supporting him, and suffered them to carry him, under the doctor's directions, into the house. "My child, come with me, that he may see you when he opens his eyes; he will not die."

"Mother," cried Edward, stopping her with extraordinary emotion, "he will not die; the doctor says so. Is this *my* fault? But, mother, mother, you are mistaken, this is not Helen; it is May."

"It is Aprile!" cried the mother. "Another time,—another time, dear boy; but he must see *her* when he opens his eyes."

Strangely confused and trembling, the girl went with her. She knew something of her own history, though her sister had not been permitted to know it; she knew that somewhere in the world she had another mother who was not Mrs. Walkingden; but it was Mrs. Walkingden who came forward now with a secret trouble to stop the further course of the mother and the child.

"Mrs. Molyneux," said the good woman, with a jealous throb in her distress; "Mrs. Crawford Molyneux; but who—*who* are you? You take my child and call her strange names. Do I know you? I do not think I have ever seen you before."

"I am Aprile's mother, and Edward's," said Amy, leaving the girl's hand. "I left my baby—God forgive me! I was so young—though I would sooner have died; I have never

known a day unclouded from that night until now. Oh, merciful, charitable woman! you have been my child's mother; you have been happier than I; forgive us, you have done our duty; it is this which has stricken down her father in the midst of his strength. God's hand has been heavy upon us. Forgive us, and give us back our child."

Mrs. Walkingden turned to her husband, who came up to the group with a jealousy almost equal to her own; moved, but indisposed to confess it.

"Oh Sam!" cried the good woman; "are we their judges? I said she never was in fault, that poor mother,—I said it from the first day. It comes hardly upon us that have bred her for our own, and loved her all her life. But God bless her, she brought a blessing to the house. I never said it before except to May herself, the dear simple-hearted soul. I never owned she was not mine as well as her sister; but Helen, Helen, come here, my only one! Do you see this? I never had a baby of my own, I never had a born child, but you."

This confession, which this other mother had long planned in her secret heart to make some time—not that she loved May less, but Helen more—she made sobbing with her arms round the neck of her own child. Mr. Walkingden fixed his eyes on these two out of all the group, as nature bade.

"And they would have her, too!" he said, with a pang, as he hurried away. He could not cry, and sob, and kiss like the women, but he was confused, and sorry, and unsettled—he who had risen this morning the father of two daughters who belonged to him wholly—vexed at the bottom of his heart.

While Amy, taking her child once more by the hand, with loving eyes, that never left her, and a tender gladness refreshing and strengthening her soul, led Aprile into the sick man's chamber, and set her lost child where *he* could see her whenever he should open his eyes.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THAT motherly expedient did not fail. When Crawford opened his eyes that evening in the failing light, he saw before him, with her timid strange looks, softened by the wonderful consciousness that this man whom she was watching was her father, and by the tenderest pity for his sufferings—he saw before him Amy, in a renewed everlasting youth, the only vision of womankind which had ever, even for a moment, touched his own worldly heart. In his sudden shock of illness, he had forgotten a good deal of what had passed, and now that his great horror and fear were over, it was but likely and natural that he should forget much of the part his wife had taken during the whole; but he had not lost his impression of renewed kindness for her, nor a pleasing and flattering consciousness of the love she had shown *him*. These feelings blended with the more special awe and consolation of his recollections as he slowly came to himself. His wife was not there—or if there, he could not see her—but he saw the lovely young woman, shy, wistful, and pitiful, timid of him, yet anxious to serve him, who was Amy, and yet was not Amy—who was his daughter, and not his wife.

He beckoned her to come to him, earnestly yet somewhat doubtfully; and she, still more doubtfully, approached his bedside. "My child, are you Aprile?" said Crawford, with a voice that faltered, partly with emotion, and partly with the strange change so suddenly fallen, that made him ready to acknowledge the child he had deserted and sinned against.

"They say so," said the girl, drooping her head and with tears in her eyes. "They say so;" and her lip quivered a little. It was a great change to Mr. Walkingden's daughter; at the first touch, it did not make her very happy. She felt strange and chilled in the presence of this stranger, who was a stranger, though her father; sorry for him: but it was he who had left her to her fate in her unconscious infancy—it was he who had torn her natural mother from her—it was

he, who seeking her out at last, not for *her* sake, had set her for all her past life in a false position, and for all her future in an uncongenial one. So she thought at this early moment, and she could not look the happiness which she did not feel.

"I see, we have interrupted your life, and we are strangers to you, and the change is hard. I do not wonder," said Crawford, who was gentler to her in this respect than Amy, giving love and claiming it, could have been; "but are you not pleased, poor child, to see your mother?"

"Yes!" cried the poor foundling, with a burst of tears: the question went to her heart.

"The rest will come in time; but she never harmed you, poor soul; *she* has pined for you all her life," said Crawford, gravely. He did not speak like a man repentant, sorrowing over his sin, but he did justice, seriously, and as a matter of justice to his wife, and he could forgive his daughter for showing no eagerness of nature towards himself. "We will not drag you away from your friends, nor make you unhappy, Aprile; I will undertake for that. Now call your mother to me, and Edward; and unless you wish it, do not leave us yourself, my poor child."

This strange sympathy and indulgence, a totally new quality in Crawford, touched deeply and strangely the heart of his new-found daughter. He seemed disposed, with so extraordinary a description of fatherly tenderness, to excuse her from loving himself, a thing which he perceived to be unnatural and unlikely, that the troubled Aprile went hastily from the room, trying not to cry, and a great deal nearer loving her new father than she could have imagined possible. A minute after, Amy entered with her son; she had been waiting in the next apartment, and it was only on seeing symptoms of her husband's waking that she *had* left him, with a simple contrivance, that he might speak to Aprile for the first time alone. Aprile stole in behind them, keeping back out of sight. She had no true place to-day in this house, which had been her home till now. Mrs. Walkingden was shut up alone with Helen, amazing and trembling that gentle visionary with the whole history of Aprile's adoption, of her own unlooked-for birth, and of the love which, at its deepest and

fullest, belonged to the "born child" of her parents alone. Mr. Walkingden had gone out to blow off the fumes of *his* dissatisfaction and excitement. Poor Aprile, excluded from one mother, and embarrassed by the overpowering tenderness of the other, could find no place for herself, unless she could have escaped to her own room, to cry and be very wretched, over this new "happiness." In these circumstances, Crawford's consideration and indulgence were almost the only things which strengthened her—her heart warmed to him with gratitude, that he did not expect. She came in behind them softly, that new father, mother, brother—shy, unfamiliar, strange, more entirely and sadly alone than she had ever felt in her life.

"Does Edward know?" said Crawford. It was dark, they could scarcely see him; and now that his fears had proved fruitless, he was ashamed to look in his son's face, and glad of the darkness. This moment was half as hard to him as the moment before he saw Aprile; he feared the contempt of his son, he feared the very tone, the beloved voice, of his boy.

"All, everything!" cried Edward; "and my own abominable ingratitude and disobedience, dear father, to think that I should have caused you so much pain—I, whom you have been so good to all my life!"

He turned aside his head to the wall and said, "Ah!" with an extraordinary pang of relief and joy. He could not utter another syllable—he could not think. It was all over—the one misery and the other. Edward was happy—Edward was guiltless—and did not turn aside, in lofty youthful virtue, from the father who had sinned so long and deeply—God forgive him! Though he might have done so, that honorable, innocent boy!

There was a little pause, the room was dark, the twilight was almost night—but they were all glad of the gloom. Amy whom that strange experience of full happiness had strangely affected—Amy who had no wish but to keep behind and remain unseen, and rejoice herself in the silent sight of her husband restored, and her children together—went softly to Aprile, who stood almost out of sight, and put her arm through the arm of her firstborn, leaning upon her with a

motherly pride and consolation. Aprile, who was half afraid of the tenderness which she could not respond to, felt this quite familiar touch move her, as no embrace could have done. She put her own soft little hand upon her mother's, with a sudden access of quiet sobbing and happiness—two hands which nature had shaped after the same pattern; two faces which, but for the tender difference of youth and age, a sweet difference between a mother and daughter, were identical. She could not see her mother's face, for the darkness and her own tears; but recognized with a strange thrill, in the very poise of Amy's head, and attitude of her person, the movements and attitudes peculiar to herself. She could not resist that strange charm and fascination—she who was so like her mother! She stood, crying and trembling in the darkness, growing happy, learning to feel that she belonged to these strangers, at last and for ever.

"But, father," said Edward; and he paused and collected himself nervously; "father! I cannot stand beside you here without being certain that *you* know everything and forgive me. I have done what I cannot repent of, and yet I know it to be against your wishes. Father! I stand by myself no longer—I have some one else to present to you, to ask your kindness for. Oh, sir, hear me out! hear my mother and my sister speak for me! Without *her*, happiness is only a name, and I do not care for life!"

Another silence, the young lover's heart beating with his appeal and his hopes, and his first youthful passion of doubt, determination, and love; the mother anxious for him, anxious for his father's answer—doubly anxious, without knowing it, to preserve the new man, whom her imagination and tenderness had created in her husband, during his days of suffering; and Aprile, quivering all over with the sound of that certain voice of kindred, the calm security which the poor child wanted most—calling her his sister, and assuming that *she* could plead for him! while the father lay still and made no answer—why? Because, in the first place, he was recovering himself, rising out of his last pangs, those pangs which anticipated his son's contempt, into a certain strange satisfaction, at the thought that they had found their natural stand-

ing-ground again, and that it was Edward who stood before *him*, a culprit to be pleaded for and forgiven. But this was not all. Mingled with it came a grudge to yield *that* boy to a union with the daughter of a Samuel Walkingden, to receive as his daughter the child of people to whom he owed a debt of obligation so humiliating. His probation, hard as it was, though it had made a new man of him in some things, had not changed his character or nature. He hesitated to say anything that could look like consent.

"It is not what I should have wished for you," he said, after a long interval; then, when another pause betrayed to him how anxiously they all waited for his answer, he continued, with more emotion, "I had set all my hopes and pride on *you*, Edward; it is not what I should have wished."

"I know it, father," cried Edward, breathlessly; "but you have not seen Helen!"

"I *have* seen her," said Crawford, already able to smile at this lover's argument. "I know—yes—everything you could say. Let me have quiet, my boy, to-night. Thank God, she is not *my* daughter. *My* daughter, where is *she*, Edward?—with her mother, safe? Ah, there was Amy, as I saw her first. God help us and forgive us! was it wonderful, thinking of that creature, that I should fear?"

He spoke with a momentary realization of his past sufferings, which overpowered him with sudden gratitude, and did not think who heard him, nor what he said, but his words dispersed into a sweeter and lighter emotion all the great troubles and tumult of the day. His wife in the darkness, cried a little and covered her face, overpowered with that ineffable flattery, all the sweeter that it was unconscious. The new daughter, with a flutter at her heart, and a momentary blush, felt, with shy delight, that her true father, her own father, he who wisely did not expect her to love him in a moment, was yet proud of *her*, and Edward turned from the bedside, with smiles of hope, pleased, yet wondering with a happy superiority how any one could suppose it possible to compare his pretty new sister, pretty as he acknowledged her, with Helen! After that, lights were brought in and the doctor's commands about perfect quiet, no excitement, and all the rest, suddenly

thought upon, and put into such execution as was practicable. But Crawford was not apoplectic, nor nervous by nature, not a man to be hurried out of existence, like his uncle Molyneux. Slower death and harder sufferings remained in store for that strong man. His fit was the result of tortures too great for him, and he was almost himself again now.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

"THE first time May wrote to me after she went to Hawarden," said good Mrs. Walkingden, "she said they had met somebody whom she would like to have for a brother; he was just the brother she had always fancied, the child said. To be sure, what she thought of, was Helen marrying; and because Mr. Molyneux—Edward, the dear fellow!—paid attention to her the first time he ever saw her, wasn't it wonderful she should say so,—nature, Sam!"

"Humph!" said Mr. Walkingden, who was very surly; "only let there be a marriage in the business, and you'll coax a woman to anything. Sally, Sally! don't you see you're going to be wheedled out of both your children? I dare to say you'll all enjoy the orange-flowers, and that sort of thing, and a grand wedding, and a wedding breakfast; but consider, you foolish woman, how we shall like it, when you and I sit by ourselves at home, without another voice in the house, and both of them away?"

"It's the course of nature, Mr. Walkingden," said his wife, a little discouraged by the thought. "We who had such pleasure in our child, should we say that she's not to have the same, the dear soul! And then there's May, bless her! do you think *she's* going to desert her old father and mother? There's that Mr. Crawford Molyneux, Sam; he's not been the man he should be, but he has a deal of sense, as wicked men sometimes have, more's the pity. The very first night he said to May that he was not the man to drag her from her

friends, all of his own accord. To be sure, she does not belong to us, as she used to do, but I'm a mother myself, and I don't grudge that poor little woman her happiness. And as for my own darling, it's not like going into a strange family for her, nor having a grand strange mother-in-law glooming at her. Mrs. Crawford Molyneux will make as much of Helen as if she was her own child; and it's what they were sure to come to, Sam;" continued the good woman, beginning to cry a little, nevertheless, over the thought. "It's what they come into the world for, the pretty creatures. Bless you, May will be married directly, as well as our own pet. It's the course of nature, Sam; we married ourselves when all the old folks were living, and missed us. They'll never be done coming and going; and not to speak of Molyneux Hall, the most splendid place in Lancashire, and fifteen thousand a year—fifteen thousand a year! I wonder what Mrs. Walkingden at Hawarden will say to that! consider how happy she is, the darling; consider that, Sam."

"Yes, she's happy enough," said the discontented father, "but I don't see the good of bringing up daughters for other people, Sally, as you do. When I begin life again, I'll have sons."

"Sons! ah, Sam, how little you know! as if boys ever belonged to anybody as girls do," cried Mrs. Walkingden; "but *I* am going to be happy. I mean to, I can tell you! There's May, poor dear child, everything anybody could wish—sorry to go away, for all her grand new friends, and coming back again many a day, *I* know; and Helen, now that everything's settled, a delight to behold. Bless my darling! I mean to be happy, because she's happy, let all the world speak as they will."

With which statement of her intentions Mrs. Walkingden cried again, and her husband said, "Humph!" with very small satisfaction either in the brilliant prospects of his own daughter, or in being relieved of the charge of his adopted child. Very true, it was the course of nature that both should marry and go away, but that is not such a consolation as it might be, under most circumstances, and the good man thought it rather hard, as he said, to bring up daughters for

other people, and could not feel his own case alleviated by the conviction that the hardship was one of the most common and universal in the world.

Crawford had found himself able to get up the next day after his attack; he had not slept much that night, but had thought a great deal, and the result of his thoughts was, that, after all that had passed, any idea of resisting Edward's love, though he regretted it, was impossible; that, after all, his boy could afford to marry without deriving any special benefit from the act; and that, perhaps, after his own great deliverance from overwhelming terror and distress, it might be well to change his old habit in many things, and to take cognizance of that thing called happiness, both his own and other people's, in his future life.

He had thought of advantage and ambition and advancement often and much, but to make anybody happy—save Edward, whose happiness had hitherto wanted no making—was an idea entirely foreign to his former thoughts. He had found out his blunder clearly enough now. He might have made his wife happy years ago, by seeking out while he was yet a humble man, undistinguished and unnotable, and could have done it without scandal, his deserted child; he might have made his daughter—his pretty daughter! to whom his heart went unawares—far happier and more at ease in her real home than anything could ever make her now; he might have put himself—and perhaps after all, in a nature which had not ceased to be selfish, that compunction went deepest—beyond the reach of those periods of misery, of that last period of indescribable anguish, which had interrupted his prosperous life. He had not made much of it, doing his own way, and choosing his own will; he had only showed to himself how, when God does not choose to use external means of punishment, He can take others, internal, unseen, invisible, which work more deadly havoc still. This man, who would have smiled with anybody at fire and brimstone, knew something—a little by this time, or thought he knew—of that Hell where the worm dieth not. He shuddered at the dreadful simile, but in his deliverance and recovery vowed—to himself, if not to God—another life.

And she was pretty, that pensive, fanciful Helen!—pretty enough to lead into folly and disobedience any young man of one-and-twenty, had he been cleverer than Edward—and with materials in her more likely to make a very fine lady and person of fashion than either Aprile or her mother. His wife could refuse nothing in the world to the pretty young creature, who was not only Edward's betrothed, but Aprile's sister, and when Crawford was sufficiently recovered to come downstairs, he did not withhold his "blessing" from the young couple. He himself, with his statesman gravity and courtly bearing, looked a very imposing personage in the homely house of the Walkingdens. Fortunately, the excellent master of Myrtle Villa agreed in politics with Mr. Crawford Molyneux, and had read his speeches, and looked up to him as a political leader, long before he suspected any possible connection between himself and the Secretary of State. Then the pretty Helen, who had ambitions, and an ideal preference for the grand and stately, admired hugely her future distinguished father-in-law, and received his notice with a delicate reverence and awe, which was flattering. So that, at last, what with the satisfaction of Helen's happiness and future greatness, and the personal vanity of connections so splendid for themselves, and general approval, "at last," of the manner in which Aprile's parents conducted themselves in their difficult position, content was restored in Myrtle Villa. The good people there were pleased to permit their pretty Helen to accompany Aprile to her new home. Mrs. Walkingden, good woman, was delighted with the idea of going to Molyneux herself shortly after, to bring home her child, and altogether things arranged themselves smoothly enough at last.

The Molyneux party left town with an amount of comfort which would have seemed impossible to any of them, even to Edward, on their arrival. Mrs. Walkingden cried, and Mr. Walkingden said "humph!" and Aprile came back in silent gratitude and compunction, after every one else had said good-bye, to kiss once more with profound sadness, the kind protectors of her former life. *She* knew less where she went and what she was going to, than any of the others. It was she to whom the change was most perplexing, most unex-

pected, most forlorn; but, sitting at her new mother's side, going to find new relatives whom she had never dreamed of, with Helen's familiar face beside her, and Edward's brotherly kindness, and the grave father who did not expect her to love him, and whom, for that very reason, her perverse heart began to love, even Aprile could not find it in her to be otherwise than happy. The girls went away with their new guides, and the old people, left by themselves, were consoled, after a few natural tears, by the "prospects" of the children; and things settled themselves as well as human things ever settle themselves, after a great convulsion; and among the whole, the only sound of dissatisfaction audible was Mr. Walkingden's "humph!"

Thus they returned to Molyneux together as they left it, the husband and wife—yet not as they left it—but united as all their previous existence had failed to unite them. He did not care by this time to recur, at least in words, to those days of his agony; he did not forget them, but he said nothing now to any one of what he had suffered or feared. Once—for the last and only time, when they saw all their children on the lawn together, the first Aprile happy and at ease, finding her natural place, and attended everywhere by her admiring namesake and little sister, now no longer called Aprile, who had fallen back upon the second name of Gertrude with which her mother's hopeful foresight had provided her—once only, Crawford entered upon the subject with his wife.

"Amy," he said, "I have never asked you to forgive me. I have been hard enough upon you at all times, Heaven knows. But for my fault, your life might have been much happier, your whole existence different; I know now all the harm I did you, my poor faithful little wife, when I dragged you away from your child."

"Oh, Charles, Charles! do not say so! it was *my* fault, far more my fault than yours!" cried poor Amy, with the deepest earnestness and sincerity, and a rush of deprecating tears.

"You have said so before, and I suffered you," he said, with a smile, "knowing then, as I know now, that it was folly, and a mere fiction of your gentleness. The fault was mine. Forgive me, Amy; I have suffered for it since then,

more than once or twice. Thank Heaven, the wrong is righted now."

"Ah, Charles! but Gerty would never have done what I did," cried Amy, expressing for the only time in words that long conviction and compunction, which had run through her life. "Gerty would have saved you that misery, and herself the sin."

"Gerty—yes—I dare say you are right, Amy," said her husband; "but Gerty, even if she had not been my sister, could never, by any chance, have made a wife for *me*."

And so he went away, his last confidential words on this subject over; leaving her, yes, the poor little woman! in a sweet commotion of surprised and flattered delight. It was true he had never been a kind husband, true that he was not a very great man, in spite of all his offices and rank; but it was equally true that she *was* his wife, and that the flattering certainty that he had chosen her, he who would never have chosen Gertrude, was such a compliment as never before had been paid to Amy. That and the other unconscious revelation made on his sick-bed of the warm remembrance of her girlish beauty, which had remained in his mind through all those alienated years, made his poor little wife's heart throb with a personal happiness, strange, unusual, unprecedented in her experience. "Little does poor folk good," says the homely Scotch proverb, "and as little they get." It might be very well applied to such women as Amy. At last, in her life, she had got this "little," and it was cordial to her heart.

CHAPTER LXXV.

It is needless to describe with what a blank of utter amazement the news of Aprile's existence was received by all belonging to or connected with the Crawfords of Rookley. One simultaneous exclamation dropped almost at the same moment from the lips of two ladies, at two breakfast tables, in two different and distant counties, as each dropped a letter from her hands in the extremity of incredulous wonder. "This is what it was!" cried Mrs. Maria, overturning her cup of tea in the unusual excitement of this extraordinary discovery. "That was it!" exclaimed Gertrude, springing up from her breakfast table with all her old vehemence, and sweeping her chair to the ground with skirts which were fuller even than of old; and both, on being interrogated by their respective husbands, answered in very nearly the same words: "What Charley did to his wife!" Mrs. Maria having made this answer unconsciously in her excitement—without remembering that the second Charley Crawford, her husband's nephew and presumptive heir, sat with them at table, where he too, with many extraordinary alternations of color, was deeply absorbed in his letters from Molyneux—said nothing further at the moment, but handed her epistle to her husband. Gertrude, who had no such inducement to be silent, read hers aloud with countless comments, pausing, to the extreme wonder of her own little daughters, to interject into this most romantic and delightful discovery of a new cousin, long accounts of various scenes which happened at Rookley "ages ago," which *they* could not perceive had anything to do with the matter. As for sister Madge—long ago married to that curate, who had consented on his return home to become a rector, and whose change of opinion as to the marriage of clergymen had communicated itself to the mind of his disciple after various little difficulties—Madge retired from *her* family bread and butter, in tears, half for the wickedness of humanity, and half for the happiness of her sister. Each letter—they

were all written by Amy—ended with an urgent invitation to Molyneux ; each contained, in a postscript, a second astounding intimation, that of Edward's marriage ; and each of the ladies who received these startling epistles, made preparations with all the speed possible in their various circumstances to see the unknown daughter and inspect the affianced bride.

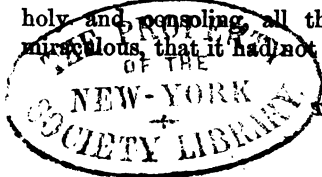
That very same day Charley went home, not exactly acting upon his own will in the matter ; for this boy, who had never been, like Edward, his father's favorite, who had less love, perhaps, to bias him, and a clearer intellect to judge, was not so satisfied with the story as his brother. He felt a little ashamed of it—ashamed to understand, by his aunt's exclamation, that something had been suspected, and ashamed that these suspicions had been true. Charley met his father, when he did meet him, with a half-averted face and a red burning color, as though he himself had been guilty of something wrong ; but fortunately Mr. Crawford Molyneux had got over his guilt some time before, and thought of nothing less than the displeasure and disapproval of his second son. Amy, who did discern it, and who was now her husband's most jealous vindicator, took her son to her dressing-room and told him all the story much more fully than she had required to tell Edward, taking so much of the guilt upon herself, that the poor boy's heart was touched and he became ashamed of his own unfilial though unspoken blame ; but she could not wring any further satisfaction out of this self-opinioned young man than an abrupt "I am not my father's judge," which greatly vexed Amy, after all the pains she had been at to show him that the fault was hers, and *not* his father's.

Charley, however, was the only one of the family who gave her any uneasiness on this score. As for Reginald and Joe, when these boys came home for their holidays, they were both sworn champions of their new sister, and *their* curiosity was not hard to satisfy. Aprile was their sister somehow, as Helen was going to be when she married Edward, and there was to be a wedding and a very jolly Christmas and lots of fun. Joe and Regy would have swallowed a much greater unlikelihood than an unknown sister on that inducement. Edward was happy ; Aprile was becoming happy ; Mr. Craw-

ford Molyneux had recovered everything save his harshness, which now reappeared no more; and perhaps Amy might have been *too* happy in her own person, but for that red flush which covered Charley's face when he addressed his father. If the mother *had* a favorite among her sons, perhaps Charley, who had been sometimes unduly thrown into the shade by Edward's preference, was the one; and the new Aprile was soon warm friends with her dissatisfied brother; but Charley disapproved of his father still.

However, life had now come back to them in its full tide—life full of events. The vicissitudes and changes naturally at work in a house where the children have become men and women, and where marriage, the great undoer, as it is the great original, of family ties, had begun its appointed operation. Aprile, who had wisely waited for her natural sphere before having any lovers, had small reason to complain of any scarcity of that commodity thereafter. Her father, strangely recovered of his shame concerning her, was more proud of her sunshiny beauty than of anything else in the world but Edward. Chances of a very brilliant marriage for his daughter flattered him secretly, though nobody knew of it. He had not forgotten the misery which preceded her restoration to her own family; but perhaps in the quiet of his gathering years, in the grateful tenderness of his wife, who took every word of kindness as an astounding bounty, and could not conceal her delight in the goodness of her husband, perhaps with all his decorums and proprieties round him, with more love than he deserved, and the supreme consciousness of having once humbled himself and made amends,—Crawford *had* forgotten, if not his special punishment, at least his special guilt.

If that guilt ever found him again, it did not appear in his life. They had their vexations and troubles after their long halcyon interval, like most other parents and people, but bore them arm in arm, with a novel union, a marriage of old age, holy and consoling, all the more strange, sustaining, and miraculous, that it had not existed in their youth.



THE END.

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